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New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in Myanmar

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Myanmar

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Grandi is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Amman.

I now give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: We are discussing the crisis in Myanmar in this Chamber for the first time in 2018. It is now five months since the start of the violence that has forced 688,000 Rohingya across the border, and the outflow of people continues, although at a lower rate. As of 5 February, between 1,000 and 1,200 people were reportedly waiting on a beach in Maungdaw, planning to leave for Bangladesh. Since the last briefing by Under-Secretary-General Feltman on 12 December 2017 (see S/PV.8133), the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/248 on the human rights situation in Myanmar by vote.

The Secretary-General has laid out three priorities that provide an important framework for assessing the situation. Regrettably, while there has been certain progress, not all have been implemented thus far.

First, we need to end the violence and improve the security situation. Although large-scale acts of violence have subsided, concerns about threats and intimidation against the remaining Rohingya population from Bamar and Rakhine communities, as well as from militia and security forces in Rakhine state, persist. Bamar-Rakhine tensions remain high, further fuelled by incidents, such as a clash between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the military on 7 January, or the incident in Mrauk U on 16 January, in which police shot and killed seven Rakhine nationalist protestors, and later imprisoned two noted Rakhine leaders. We remain concerned about the protection of future returnees.

On 14 November 2017, the Government of Myanmar reportedly transmitted to the Bangladesh authorities a list of 1,300 of what it called suspected terrorists and asked for their extradition. The Government also published in the official newspaper the names and photos of hundreds of suspected terrorists. These steps have raised questions about due process and possible intimidation of potential returnees.

Secondly, humanitarian access must be secured immediately in the affected areas of Rakhine. Such access continues to be severely curtailed. The majority of humanitarian organizations that previously worked in Rakhine are simply not allowed to enter the area. A handful of organizations have been given travel authorizations, but in a short-term and unpredictable manner that impedes the systematic delivery of assistance. The United Nations does not have sufficient access to make a meaningful assessment of the humanitarian or human rights situation. Thus, there is little sense of whether the full range of humanitarian needs of the population is being met and whether the human rights of all people of the region are being protected.

Thirdly, we must ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin or choice. Let me acknowledge the fact that the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding and established a joint working group that reached an agreement on 16 January on a number of issues in order to facilitate the return process. It is also important to note that Myanmar has made progress in its logistical preparations to receive returning refugees.

On the issues related to repatriation, I will defer to High Commissioner Grandi to provide more details.

The Secretary-General has underlined the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission as a key element of creating conditions for a safe and dignified return. The Government has taken some high-level steps to advance this process, including convening an advisory board, led by Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai and comprising distinguished national and international participants. At the end of its deliberations, the board offered

preliminary recommendations to the Implementation Committee, including the involvement of United Nations an early stage, full humanitarian access as soon as possible, wider media access and the formation of an independent fact-finding commission.

In this context, I wish to reiterate that we urge the Government to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and all United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular the fact-finding mission mandated by the Human Rights Council, and with the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar. It is important that the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms not be undermined by other mechanisms.

As suggested by the final report of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, we urge the Government to take a leadership role in promoting intercommunal cohesion, create an environment conducive to dialogue, foster the values of tolerance and respect for basic human rights between Rakhine and Rohingya communities, and accelerate and align the citizenship verification process in alignment with international standards and treaties. Overall, addressing the root causes is fundamental to ensuring a durable and genuine solution to this crisis. We have consistently said that the problem is statelessness. This must be addressed.

In line with the Council's presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22), the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, made her first official visit to Myanmar from 14 to 17 December 2017 to address reports of conflict-related sexual violence. In her consultations, she advocated for the swift adoption of a joint communiqué of the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, in accordance with resolution 2106 (2013).

While we discuss Rakhine, we also take this opportunity to note other developments in Myanmar, in particular the ongoing fighting as well as the peacemaking efforts between the Government and diverse ethnic armed organizations. We are concerned that fighting in Kachin and northern Shan states has escalated in recent months. This has cast a shadow on peace negotiations and provoked a number of serious human rights and humanitarian concerns. Such concerns include the situation in Tanai, Kachin, where many civilians have been killed or injured and as many as 5,000 civilians are reportedly unable to leave the area, where fighting is ongoing. And as in Rakhine state, the Government has severely restricted humanitarian access in many of the most critical areas. The United Nations is therefore unable to verify the numbers of people affected.

On a more positive note, two ethnic armed organizations, the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union, signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Nay Pyi Taw today. The signing is the first of its kind for the ruling National League for Democracy Government and brings the total number of ethnic armed groups that have signed the Agreement to 10 out of 16.

Finally, I would like to address the unfortunate arrest of two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. The Secretary-General has called in clear terms for the release of these journalists and urged the authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression and information. Allow me to reiterate those calls here today. The ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression and information is a barometer for respect for human rights more broadly. Reuters has now published the story these journalists were working on — a deeply disturbing account of the execution of 10 Rohingya men in the village of Inn Din, Maungdaw, in northern Rakhine state. The Associated Press has also published a report of five mass graves in Gudar Pyin village in Buthidaung. These and other shocking reports of grave abuses demand our attention and action for the sake of lasting peace and justice.

The President: I thank the Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Grandi.

Mr. Grandi: Abdallah is a father of eight from Buthidaung, in the northern part of Myanmar's Rakhine state. When he fled to Bangladesh in September last year he became a refugee for the third time. The first time was in 1978, when he came to Bangladesh as a young boy, and the second was in 1991. That second time he remained for three years and then, anxious to recover his home and his four acres of land, he returned to Myanmar as part of an organized voluntary repatriation operation.

Back home, he and his family started to rebuild their lives. They had seven cows and were able to make a living. But, he says, around two years after his return, "hope started to fade away". Forced

labour, confiscation of crops and cattle and relentless incremental restrictions on their freedom of movement, their right to worship and their access to livelihoods constrained their existence.

Last year his village was attacked. Houses were burned and others in his community, including his own nephew, were shot dead. Hiding nearby, he saw his own his own home torched. He had no choice but to flee again. And he is once again living in a flimsy shelter in Kutupalong refugee settlement, together with his family, despairing at the prospect of never being able to build a safe and stable life. "My decision to return was wrong", he said recently. "That is why we are suffering now."

It has been almost six months, as we heard, since the current rapid and chaotic outflow of more than 688,000 refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh began, driven by violence and destruction, following decades of repression and exclusion. That movement has now been significantly reduced, but it still continues. Already this month, some 1,500 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh. The Government and the people of Bangladesh continue to receive refugees and provide them with protection and support. For this, they are to be deeply commended.

With reports of insecurity continuing, as we heard from the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, it is critical that the border remains open and that those still fleeing are able to reach safety. The Government of Bangladesh, together with highly-skilled national and local organizations, the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies with solid donor support, has mounted an impressive response. Yet conditions remain overcrowded and precarious for many, including for host communities. Disease outbreaks, including diphtheria, have been met with decisive action but remain a significant risk.

We are now in a race against time as a major new emergency looms. The monsoon season will start in March. We estimate that more than 100,000 refugees are living in areas prone to flooding or landslides. Tens of thousands of particularly vulnerable refugees must be urgently relocated. Their lives are at grave risk. The foundation of existing shelters must be strengthened; bridges built and reinforced and new land found and made ready. The Government is steering a massive emergency preparedness effort. Nonetheless, international support must be stepped up to avert a catastrophe. The Kutupalong area in Cox's Bazar is now the largest refugee settlement in the world, with its own character, economy and emerging social structures.

As we have repeatedly stated, resolving the crisis means finding solutions inside Myanmar. However, while they are pursued — as they must be — significant support will be required in Bangladesh. Humanitarian action and funding must be sustained but longer-term support will also be required to help the Government reinforce local infrastructure and economy and ensure access to opportunities for refugees and the communities hosting them. Education and opportunities to develop skills and earn an income will be critical in order to avoid the deep despair that can set in when refugees are abandoned on the margins of societies. We must ensure that young people retain a vision of a future and that the ground is laid for eventual voluntary return. Failure to do that will inevitably lead to disillusionment and radicalization. It will also expose refugees to protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation.

The causes of the crisis originate in Myanmar, and a genuine search for solutions must finally start. At the heart of it all is the restoration of rights, including the right of refugees to return home voluntarily, and in safe and dignified conditions. Let me be clear. Conditions are not yet conducive to the voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees. The causes of their flight have not been addressed, and we have yet to see substantive progress on addressing the exclusion and denial of rights that has deepened in recent decades, rooted in their lack of citizenship. But preserving the right of return and pursuing the conditions that will enable it to be exercised must remain a central priority. For that reason, I welcome the dialogue between the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of the Union of Myanmar on the voluntary repatriation of refugees, and the commitment to international standards on the voluntary, safe and dignified return, setf out in the arrangement agreed between them in November 2017.

In line with my mandate to support Governments to pursue solutions for refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has extended an offer of support to both Governments, including by participating in the joint working group established for its implementation. The framework for return should eventually be defined in a tripartite agreement among the two Governments and UNHCR. Our offer of support remains open.

The construction of infrastructure to support the logistics of return is important but should not be confused with the establishment of conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation. An end to violence and the destruction of property, and granting humanitarian access throughout Rakhine state — as called for by the Secretary-General — are critical, basic steps.

Humanitarian access, as the Council has heard, remains extremely restricted. UNHCR has not had access to affected areas of the northern part of Rakhine state, beyond Maungdaw town, since August 2017, and our access in central Rakhine has also been curtailed. UNHCR presence and access throughout the state are essential to monitor protection conditions, provide independent information to refugees, and accompany returns as and when they take place. Refugees must be able to return to a place of their choice, including the location where they previously resided. Temporary arrangements should be avoided. As we have seen in Myanmar and elsewhere, they have a tendency to persist for considerably longer than envisaged, and to take on a permanent character.

The recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State are an important blueprint for a peaceful and inclusive future, and, therefore, for the sustainable return of refugees. I fully endorse the two-track approach envisaged in the report: the first focused on access to citizenship and the restoration of rights for the Rohingya, including freedom of movement, access to education and basic services, and to livelihoods; and the second on inclusive development aimed at improving the condition of all communities in Rakhine state, and on fostering peaceful co-existence.

Refugees must determine the timing and pace of returns; building their confidence is crucial. Implementing the Advisory Commission's recommendations related to central Rakhine would be a concrete first step. There, around 120,000 internally displaced people, mainly Rohingya driven from their homes by intercommunal violence, are now in their sixth year of confined encampment. Granting freedom of movement, allowing them to return home and fast-tracking the confirmation of their citizenship would send a strong signal to refugees in Bangladesh that Myanmar is genuinely committed to taking responsibility for their protection and well-being, and to pursuing lasting solutions. As in the past, UNHCR stands ready to work the Government of Myanmar in those efforts, by providing technical advice and support on securing solutions for the internally displaced, voluntary repatriation, and resolving statelessness.

Addressing the root causes of the appalling violence and systemic discrimination that has driven hundreds of thousands from their homes repeatedly over decades, and securing solutions to the current crisis will require substantial support to both Myanmar and Bangladesh. International political engagement, technical expertise and financial resources will be needed on both sides of the border, including for humanitarian and targeted development activities. Preferential trade arrangements, labour and migration pathways, innovative financing, enhanced national partnerships and expanded regional cooperation should also play a critical role. If solutions are successfully pursued, they have the potential to yield significant dividends across the wider region, while helping to prevent extremism, foster stability and spur economic development.

Despite all that they have endured, Abdullah and his family are still holding on to a vision of a future back in Myanmar. They say:

> "We want to go back but we want the United Nations to accompany us and provide security. We want to go to the village we come from — the same place. We want our belongings and our land. We want our right to move around freely like other citizens."

That call must be heeded. It is time to put an end to the repeated, devastating cycle of violence, displacement and statelessness to invest in tangible, substantial measures that will start to overcome the profound exclusion that Abdullah and the rest of the Rohingya community have endured for far too long. It is the responsibility of the Government of the Union of Myanmar, but international engagement and support are key to making it happen.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Grandi for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča and High Commissioner Grandi for their briefings.

This weekend the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, visit Cox's Bazar, where he met some of the almost 1 million Rohingya refugees

enduring the difficult living conditions that we have heard about today. Visiting northern Rakhine, he saw with his own eyes the horror of what has happened there. When he met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on Sunday, the Foreign Secretary said that there needed to be the right conditions created in Rakhine that made it safe for Rohingya refugees to return home free from fear and in the knowledge that their basic rights would be protected and upheld.

The Council stated last November that the Rohingya refugees must be allowed to return to their homes safely, voluntarily and in conditions of human dignity. The United Kingdom believes that the Council has a duty to ensure that those words are matched by action.

We should be clear on three things. We should be clear on why refugees fled Rakhine in the first place, indeed why they continue to do so; we should be clear that the conditions in Rakhine today are not yet suitable for informed, safe, voluntary and dignified returns; and we should be clear about what needs to be done now.

The Rohingya refugees fleeing Rakhine have suffered the most appalling violence: rape, murder, the burning of their villages. In December, Special Representative Pramila Patten briefed us on the horrific sexual atrocities allegedly committed by the Burmese security forces (see S/PV.8133). More details emerged last week of specific atrocities allegedly committed by Burmese security forces at Gu Dar Pyin and Inn Din villages. Even now Rohingyas still flee forced starvation and continued human rights violations. As many of us have said, this is ethnic cleansing.

We welcome the Burmese Government's willingness to enter into agreements in Bangladesh and the initial preparations that it has made for returns. Much of this is in response to the Council's focus on the crisis. But the United Kingdom believes that the conditions in Rakhine do not yet allow for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees.

We must be clear on the way forward. Last November's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) remains the guiding frame set by the Security Council for the actions that need to be taken. I want to highlight four in particular.

First, both Myanmar and Bangladesh must cooperate fully with the United Nations. We welcome Bangladesh's initial engagement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which now needs to be fully involved in the returns process, ideally through a tripartite agreement. Only UNHCR has the expertise to handle returns on the scale and give confidence to refugees. It is also essential that Myanmar allow the United Nations agencies to provide humanitarian support for all its peoples.

Secondly, the parties should take concrete steps to ensure that refugees will be able to return home on a voluntary basis and with access to accurate information. Refugees should not be sent to internment camps, and Myanmar must set out how its restitution of property and livelihoods will occur. Women and girls have suffered sexual and gender-based violence and face specific risks. They must be represented in any decision-making process and their views given special consideration.

Dismantling the camps for internally displaced persons that have existed in central Rakhine since 2012 and supporting their inhabitants in returning home would be a positive confidence-building measure. Again, we believe that UNHCR is the only agency with the necessary expertise and moral authority.

Thirdly, Myanmar must ensure the safety of all communities in Rakhine. This means an immediate halt to violence and human rights violations and steps to reduce intercommunal tensions. It also means giving refugees confidence that those who have committed crimes will be brought to justice through an open and transparent accountability process.

Instead, we have seen the arrest of two Reuters journalists who reported on the Inn Din massacre and the denial of access to United Nations-mandated human rights bodies. The United Kingdom calls for the release of the Reuters journalist and calls for the Burmese Government's full cooperation with the United Nations fact-finding mission, the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Fourthly, Myanmar must demonstrate progress in implementing the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State recommendations. These recommendations continue to provide a blueprint for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all communities in Rakhine. Crucially, they address civil and political rights, including pathways for the Rohingya to receive full Burmese citizenship as well as addressing socioeconomic development. Genuine progress in implementation would demonstrate that the Burmese

Government is sincere about offering Rohingya refugees a viable future to return to.

Before I conclude, I want to once more pay tribute to Bangladesh for hosting the Rohingya community as they fled in panic for their lives. But while they remain, Bangladesh, supported by all of us in the international community, must protect refugees and provide for their needs. This includes getting children to school, helping men and women earn livelihoods, and providing support to victims of sexual violence. The humanitarian agencies need to deliver services and prepare camps for the monsoon season.

The United Kingdom stands with Bangladesh. We have contributed £59 million in assistance. We urge the international community to do more to support Bangladesh as it helps these refugees and the communities that host them.

The world watched in horror as the violence in Rakhine forced the Rohingya to flee. The Council has played a vital role in shining a spotlight on the situation and encouraging action by the authorities on the ground. We must not turn away or become distracted. We ourselves should stand ready to visit, and we must be ready to take further action.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset warmly to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, for their particularly illuminating briefings and for their commitment.

The situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine state remains a source of serious concern for France, and I would like to thank the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council for having organized this important exchange of views.

In that context, I should like to share with the Council three lines of thinking.

The first area relates to the central question of the return of the hundreds of thousands of refugees currently in Bangladesh. The considerable efforts undertaken by Bangladesh, which is hosting almost a million refugees, must be commended and supported by the international community. The agreement of 23 November last between Burma and Bangladesh on the return of refugees is a first step towards the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to their homes when conditions so permit.

Here we must acknowledge that the conditions for such a return have not been met and that major progress remains to be made. It is crucial in particular that the High Commissioner for Refugees be fully involved in these discussions as part of a tripartite agreement with Burma and Bangladesh and that it be able to assist both countries in the implementation of the return process in accordance with international standards. Moreover, it is vital that measures to be taken in Rakhine to promote reconstruction, reconciliation and respect for human rights, as recommended in the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Mr. Kofi Annan.

Secondly, I should like to stress the need to strengthen our commitment to and our collective pressure for the full implementation of the demands made by the Council in its presidential statement of 6 November last (S/PRST/2017/22). If those demands are effectively implemented, they will contribute to creating the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees.

The first requirement was to put an end to the violence in Rakhine. While it must be recognized that the level of violence has decreased recently, hundreds of Rohingya continue to flee Burma to Bangladesh, and those who have remained there are still subjected to severe discrimination and intimidation. We continue to receive disturbing reports about the appalling living conditions of those who remain. Many villages have been razed and burned to the ground. Protecting the population must therefore remain our priority.

The second significant demand from the international community is to ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors. While the International Committee of the Red Cross and, to a lesser extent, the World Food Programme today have access to Rakhine, it is far from sufficient to identify and respond to all humanitarian needs.

A third essential element of the presidential statement adopted on 6 November concerns violations of human rights. We welcome the adoption by the General Assembly last December of the resolution on human rights in Burma (General Assembly resolution 72/248) and call for its full implementation. We condemn the serious human rights violations that continue to be committed in Burma, particularly in Rakhine.

A few days ago, a documented Reuters investigation uncovered unacceptable atrocities in a Rohingya

village — atrocities that could amount to crimes against humanity. The two journalists conducting the investigation are currently detained. We call for the immediate release, just as we reiterate our commitment to the freedom of the press and the protection of journalists, who must be able to exercise their profession freely, without fear of being intimidated or arrested. Respect for those freedoms is one of the foundations of any democratic society.

It is essential to shed light on human rights violations and to combat impunity. In that regard, we call on the Burmese authorities to cooperate with human rights actors, including the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and the Special Rapporteur. We further call upon the Burmese authorities to provide all the necessary access to the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and to UNICEF. Human rights are part of the solution, and guaranteeing its full respect will help create the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees.

That brings me to the last request of the presidential statement — which I once again underscore today — namely, the full implementation of the recommendations drawn up by the Commission chaired by Kofi Annan. Burma is faced with many challenges. Those of democratic transition and reconciliation among communities, which make Burma such a rich and diverse country, are arguably the largest and most important for the future of the country. National reconciliation will lead to a solution to the crisis in Rakhine state. Full citizenship, the freedom of movement, equal access to basic services and respect for the right to property should be granted to every person without discrimination, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin. The report of the Rakhine Advisory Commission provides a road map for the Burmese authorities to address the root causes of the Rakhine crisis and create conditions for sustainable coexistence among communities. France encourages the Burmese authorities to continue to implement those recommendations, with the support of the group of independent experts appointed to that end.

My third, and last, comment touches on the importance of the international community, and in particular the United Nations, remaining fully mobilized on that subject. While the steps taken by the Burmese authorities are a first step, the commitments must continue to be translated into action. Much progress remains to be made in each of the areas mentioned in the presidential statement adopted by the Council on 6 November. It is essential that the international community, especially by means of the Council, remain extremely vigilant and actively engaged. The next appointment of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General will allow us to lend further support to that end.

France reiterates its support for the Burmese democratic transition and the efforts of the Government led by Aung San Suu Kyi in that regard. In the face of the tragedy in Rakhine, France will continue to insist, particularly within the Security Council, on the urgent need to put an end to the violence and discrimination against the Rohingya, deliver unhindered humanitarian assistance to the population in need of it and facilitate, when conditions are right, the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of refugees. France will continue its dialogue with the Burmese authorities to that effect, proceeding the visit made to Burma by Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian last November.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China listened attentively to the briefings delivered by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and noted their positive assessment of the progress achieved in Rakhine state and the efforts made by Myanmar and Bangladesh. Those undertakings should be sufficiently affirmed. China is a friendly neighbour of Myanmar and Bangladesh. We attach great importance to the situation in Rakhine state and have provided emergency humanitarian relief for the displaced persons. At the same time, we have actively worked with both parties to push for dialogue and consultations with a view to finding a solution.

Since last November, the Foreign Minister of China, Mr. Wang Yi, visited Bangladesh and Myanmar and proposed a three-phase approach for the solution of the Rakhine state issue. It has been unanimously endorsed by Myanmar and Bangladesh. It pleases us to see that some of the approaches are being implemented. The goal of the first phase, which is to cease hostilities on the ground and restore stability and order, has basically been achieved. The goal of the second phase is to seek viable measures to find a solution to the problem through communication and consultations by both parties and is also being pushed forward. The third phase is to adopt measures to resolve the root causes of poverty through development. I am confident that this goal can soon be

achieved through the efforts of Myanmar to alleviate poverty in Rakhine state, along with the vigorous support of the international community.

The problem in Myanmar's Rakhine state has a complex historical, ethnic and religious background. It cannot be solved overnight. At present, the situation on the ground has been visibly eased. Humanitarian relief operations have been actively carried out. Myanmar and Bangladesh have maintained dialogue and consultations, held joint working group meetings on repatriation and worked with United Nations agencies.

The Rakhine Advisory Commission visited Myanmar recently and affirmed Myanmar's efforts to implement recommendations contained in its report. Recently, Myanmar invited foreign missions and media to Myanmar to visit the affected areas in Rakhine state. China appreciates Myanmar and Bangladesh for those efforts. China has noted that the process of repatriation of the displaced by Myanmar and Bangladesh has recently been delayed. We hope that the international community can objectively observe the difficulties and challenges encountered by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, remain patient and provide support and assistance. We also hope it will encourage both parties, Myanmar and Bangladesh, to appropriately solve the problems that emerged in the process of implementing their agreement through dialogue and consultations so as to repatriate the displaced at an early date.

The Security Council adopted a presidential statement in November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22) on Rakhine state.

At the moment, the situation in Rakhine state is generally stable. China has consistently maintained that the appropriate way to resolve the issue of Rakhine state is through bilateral efforts by Myanmar and Bangladesh. Only when they reach a settlement that is acceptable to the countries concerned will the agreement be capable of being implemented and sustained and of obtaining the understanding and support of every sector in those countries. China hopes that Myanmar and Bangladesh will continue to take appropriate steps and that the Security Council and the international community will play a constructive role in the process.

Lastly, I would like to reaffirm my willingness to work with all the parties to actively advance efforts aimed at helping to restore order and achieve stability and sustained development in Rakhine state.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking High Commissioner Grandi and Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for their important briefings this morning. As their remarks made clear, six months after the initial mass displacements from Rakhine, the situation in Myanmar and Bangladesh continues to be seriously worrying, and the crisis has clear implications for regional peace and stability. We joined with other colleagues on the Council in calling for this meeting today because we believe it is important to ensure that the Security Council remains seized of the matter and that the United Nations continues its active engagement.

The decision to flee one's home and undertake a dangerous journey to seek refuge in a foreign land is driven by fear for oneself and one's family. It is a decision taken when no other options remain. We have heard first-hand from those who have fled about the violence and abuse that drove them from their homes. However, we also know that when it is safe to do so, refugees want to return home. In that regard, we welcome the bilateral arrangement on the voluntary return of refugees reached between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with its global mandate as the international refugee agency, must be fully associated with the process, including by supporting verification, and should be invited to join the joint working group.

As we heard this morning, Rohingya refugees are still arriving in Bangladesh. The situation in Rakhine is clearly not yet ripe for their voluntary return. For that process to begin, it is critical to ensure conditions that will enable their return to be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable, in line with international law and the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR must be given access to Rakhine in order to assess conditions on the ground and support return operations from inside the country. Particular attention should be given to the special needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including their need for protection in the return process. Those who do decide to return voluntarily should be able to go back to their places of origin. The creation of new camps or camp-like arrangements for internally displaced persons in Rakhine must be avoided. Similarly, transition and reception centres should be temporary, and UNHCR and other organizations should have full access to them.

The Security Council presidential statement adopted in November (S/PRST/2017/22) still has to be

implemented in full, including by ensuring full and unimpeded humanitarian access. But it will not be possible to restore peace and stability in Rakhine state without also addressing the conditions that led to the violence and displacement in the first place. There is an urgent need for security, reconstruction and livelihood programmes that can benefit all the communities in Rakhine. Implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission report's recommendations must now be stepped up, in cooperation with international and regional partners. That will be critical if we are to address the root causes of the conflict, which are underdevelopment and discrimination. Implementation must include a genuine process towards citizenship for the Rohingya. While re-establishing the rule of law is urgent and a precondition for safe and voluntary returns, reconciliation between the communities in Rakhine will be essential for long-term peace and development.

The numerous reports of systematic, widespread and coordinated acts of violence are a strong indication that crimes against humanity have been committed in Rakhine. We are deeply concerned about the recent reports of mass graves, which must be duly investigated. Impunity for crimes against humanity in Rakhine cannot be tolerated, and those responsible for them must be held to account. The reports reinforce our awareness of how urgent it is that all crimes be fully investigated. In that regard, we urge Myanmar to cooperate with the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission in order to help establish the facts of what has taken place in Rakhine. We look forward to the fact-finding mission's oral report to the Human Rights Council in March. If the Myanmar authorities do not genuinely address the issue of accountability, help should be sought from the international community, including by considering a referral to the International Criminal Court.

We want to pay tribute to the Government and the people of Bangladesh for generously hosting such a large number of refugees. While no effort should be spared to create the conditions for voluntary return, long-term planning and humanitarian support for the refugees in Bangladesh must continue. The conditions in the camps are dire, and with the monsoon rains coming, there is a risk of a second humanitarian crisis within the crisis. We welcome Bangladesh's efforts and its commitment to avoiding such a humanitarian disaster, and we encourage international partners to provide additional humanitarian support. It will be essential to ensure that the host communities that are affected are also supported as part of those efforts.

There can be no doubt that the situation in Myanmar continues to be very worrying and requires both short- and long-term solutions. We call on the Government of Myanmar to fully engage with the United Nations and with other regional and international partners who want to provide assistance and can do so. Sweden and the international community stand ready to continue supporting Myanmar on its path towards peace, democracy and prosperity.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this essential meeting and the worrying presentations by Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča and High Commissioner Filippo Grandi.

Peru regrets and has been following with deep concern the situation of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim population, which has resulted from the wave of hatred and violence they have endured in northern Rakhine state. In the past five months the crisis has brought more than 700,000 people to Bangladesh and to the largest refugee camp in the world. While we welcome Bangladesh's generosity and efforts, we are concerned about the likelihood that the forthcoming monsoon season will worsen the situation, bringing the risk of new disasters and diseases. We are also concerned about the difficulties and delays in the implementation of the repatriation agreement signed by both countries in November, and especially about the lack of the conditions needed to ensure that the refugees' return of refugees is voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable. In view of the seriousness of the humanitarian situation, I will focus on two specific points.

First, we believe that the recommendations that the Annan Advisory Commission made in October constitute a suitable framework for ensuring the conditions for return. With the Advisory Commission's independent support for their implementation, the Myanmar authorities must act swiftly to make them a reality. Among other steps, that involves recognizing the full citizenship of the members of the Rohingya community and guaranteeing their safety, property rights, freedom of movement and right to make an informed choice about their place of return. Discrimination and hate speech must not be tolerated. Within the framework of the peace and national reconciliation process, the country's ethnic, religious

and cultural diversity should be safeguarded, along with the rights of minorities. Building a sustainable peace must also include ensuring access to basic services and generating economic and social development projects.

Secondly, in our view it is essential that Myanmar and Bangladesh's efforts to end this complex humanitarian crisis be supported by the international community, and by the United Nations in particular. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the competent and best disposed agency in that regard, and we advocate its full participation in the return process, from conception to execution, in line with the Council's November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22). We consider it urgent that the Government of Myanmar ensure full and unrestricted access for UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies throughout Rakhine state. We deem it essential that such assistance pay special attention to the needs of women and girls, particularly the survivors of sexual violence.

We consider it crucial that the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission, in accordance with its mandate, investigate the human rights violations that have been reported in order to determine those responsible, punish the guilty and prevent such events from reoccurring.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for their briefings on the most recent developments in Myanmar and the situation of the Rohingya.

The situation of the Rohingya refugees continues to be a source of grave concern. The complexity of the challenge in Myanmar's Rakhine state is very clear and has deep roots. That means that the societal and the humanitarian challenges are huge. Addressing the root causes that forced the Rohingya to flee in the first place will not be easy. However, efforts have to be made with the required seriousness of purpose.

We want to be hopeful with regard to the efforts being made to facilitate the voluntary return of the Rohingya refugees in line with the memorandum of understanding signed between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar. However, clearly, the challenges are formidable, all the more so since they relate to demands that the root causes be addressed. As High Commissioner Grandi said earlier, that entails the restoration of rights. That is why our approach to addressing the issue needs to change. As some people are already saying, an international response that consists primarily of assigning blame for the humanitarian tragedy is no longer tenable. It is time for the international community to find a realistic workable solution.

In that context, there is a need to end the violence in Rakhine state and to create conditions for the safe and dignified return of the refugees and displaced persons, as well as to ensure humanitarian access. In that connection, we take note of the steps taken thus far by the Myanmar Government. However, there is no doubt that much remains to be done in order not only to alleviate the suffering and frustration of the people of Rakhine state but also to embrace all communities and to ensure peace and harmony. We believe that enhanced communication and cooperation between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar are vital to ensuring the implementation of the arrangement on the return of persons displaced from Rakhine state in conditions of safety and dignity.

The role of the international community, including the United Nations and its various agencies operating on the ground, as well as other organizations, such as, inter alia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is also very important in support of such efforts. Ultimately, as we said earlier, what matters most is to address the root cause of the problem.

The implementation of the recommendations made by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State will certainly contribute to tackling the long-standing obstacles to peace and development in Rakhine state. We commend the initial step taken by the Government of Myanmar but it is necessary to accelerate the implementation. That is a Herculean task, which requires the sustained commitment and engagement of the Government, as well as the support of the international community, to ultimately ensure that all communities are treated without discrimination, regardless of religion or ethnicity, and to support the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced individuals and refugees to their homes.

Finally, we appreciate the continued engagement of the Secretary-General through his good offices. We believe that a visit by the Security Council to both Bangladesh and Myanmar could be useful in order to gain a better appreciation of the situation on the ground and to support the Governments of both countries in

their efforts to address the situation of the Rohingya refugees. We take note of the briefing by Kuwait on this issue, and we hope that future presidencies will take up the matter.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for putting this very serious issue on our agenda. Allow me to express my appreciation to Mr. Jenča and Mr. Grandi for their excellent briefings.

Today, I will focus on three issues: first, the current situation in Myanmar; secondly, how to ensure the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the Rohingya; and thirdly, the humanitarian challenges in the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Regarding my first point, on the current situation in Myanmar, every week that passes, we hear more stories of atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingya people following the events of last August — stories of mass graves in the village of Inn Din, a coastal village whence the entire Rohingya population of 6,000 people fled; stories of young girls who are the victims of sexual violence; stories of children who saw their parents and siblings killed and had to find their own way to safety in Bangladesh; and stories of almost 700,000 people who had to flee from their homes.

It is often journalists who bring us such stories. In that respect, as others have done, let me mention the plight of the Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. Both were detained two months ago while working on a report on the mass graves in Inn Din. We call on the Government of Myanmar to respect their rights. They should be released now. Furthermore, the Government should allow journalists to work independently and without undue interference, as stated in resolution 2222 (2015). Fundamental human rights are at stake, as Mr. Jenča said earlier.

The recent testimonies of the situation in Myanmar are shocking. They press upon us the need to address the mass atrocities and to find a durable and just resolution to the dreadful plight of the Rohingya. The crisis continues to affect the security not only of Myanmar but also of its neighbours. The situation therefore warrants the close and continued attention of the Security Council.

That brings me to my second point — the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the refugees. We welcome the steps undertaken by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to build a framework for eventual return. We emphasize the right of return of all refugees to Myanmar. However, it is clear that the conditions in Rakhine state are not yet sufficient to start that process. Returns can take place only if they are voluntary, safe and dignified. The independent monitoring of that process is essential to ensuring that it meets international standards.

Myanmar should allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to play a role in the repatriation process. Access for United Nations and other humanitarian aid organizations into Rakhine state is key to establishing if it is safe enough to return. The voices of the Rohingya themselves also need to be heard. The large majority of Rohingya do not want to go back yet. They fear a repetition of the abuses that forced them to flee.

It is primarily up to the Myanmar authorities to ensure the safety of their own population. They have the primary responsibility to protect their own people. The many reports of grave violations and abuses of human rights, including by the military, need to be thoroughly investigated and to be prosecuted. We need accountability. That is crucial to ensure the long-term stability of Myanmar. We call on Myanmar to allow access for the fact-finding mission. We encourage Myanmar to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court through accession or self-referral.

The return of the Rohingya must be dignified and sustainable. The root causes of the current crisis therefore need to be addressed. We call on Myanmar to establish a concrete action plan for the full implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Kofi Annan. Living conditions need to be improved and decades of discrimination must be brought to an end. Returnees need access to appropriate shelter, not in camps, but in the villages that they fled from, and victims require proper rehabilitation. These are steps that should be taken right now.

This brings me to my third point: humanitarian challenges and especially the humanitarian situation in the camps in Cox's Bazar. We commend the generous efforts of Bangladesh to welcome and shelter the refugees on its soil. We are aware of the tremendous challenges the situation creates for the host communities. The international community will continue to depend on Bangladesh, as long as safe, voluntary and dignified returns remain impossible. The rainy season will only

increase the challenges in the Bangladeshi camps. We should all stand ready to help Bangladesh overcome these challenges, and we encourage Bangladesh to work with United Nations agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to meet them.

In conclusion, for the Rohingya to be able to return to their homes and to continue their lives peacefully and sustainably in Myanmar, we call on all parties to work on the following: first, a long-term political solution that respects the rights of minorities; secondly, accountability for perpetrators of violators of international humanitarian law and human rights law; thirdly, meeting the preconditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees; and fourthly, in the meantime, supporting the Bangladeshi efforts to shelter the Rohingya on their soil.

The situation is so serious that we should keep this issue high on the agenda of the Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Grandi and Mr. Jenča for their briefings.

The news reports from Burma have long been brutal and heartbreaking. Because of the lack of access granted by the Burmese Government, few reports get out, but those that do are simply horrifying. The Associated Press recently told the story of Kadir, a Rohingya man from the village of Gu Dar Pyin. Kadir and 14 of his friends were choosing sides for a game of a traditional Burmese sport when the Burmese military began shooting. Survivors reported that more than 200 soldiers descended on the village, burning homes and shooting anyone who could not get away. Kadir got away, but only he and two friends survived the shooting. When he returned to the village six days later, Kadir found his teammates partially buried in mass graves. In all, there were reportedly five mass graves.

The Burmese Government regularly denies the existence of massacres and mass graves and claims to be fighting terrorists. But what Kadir found that day indicated that the military knew what it was doing was wrong and did not want the world to know. To his horror, Kadir saw that not only were his friends dead, but also their faces had been burned away with acid. Some had been disfigured by bullet wounds. The Burmese soldiers had also burned away the hands of the dead so the bodies could not be identified.

The Associated Press reporters who uncovered these atrocities deserve our thanks and praise. It is neither easy nor safe to report from Burma these days. Two Reuters reporters uncovered evidence of another massacre and mass grave in a fishing village last September and they paid for it with their freedom. They reported that the police ordered villagers to participate in the killing, dismemberment and burial in a mass grave of 10 Rohingya men and boys. Witnesses said that some were still alive when they were thrown into the grave. The police claim that they were acting in self-defence, that the Rohingya men attacked them, but the reporters compiled evidence, including photos, that contradicted the police. For the crime of reporting the truth, the Burmese Government arrested and imprisoned the reporters. They remain incarcerated in Burma without bail. We strongly call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Like the soldiers in Gu Dar Pyin, powerful forces in the Burmese Government have denied the ethnic cleansing in Rakhine state. To make sure that no one contradicts their preposterous denials, they are preventing access to Rakhine to anyone or any organization that might bear witness to their atrocities, including the Security Council. The result is that they are denying access to many organizations that the displaced and starving in Burma desperately need today.

Even before the violence started, malnutrition was a serious problem in Rakhine state, but now there are reports from Rohingya who have found refuge in Bangladesh that the military's actions are leading a campaign of purposeful starvation, forcing more families out of the country. Homes are being looted. Farmers are being denied the ability to harvest their crops. Girls and women are being abducted into sexual slavery.

We have urged Burma to work with the United Nations and its agencies to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations immediate and unhindered access to Rakhine state. We repeat that call today with even more urgency. The need for humanitarian aid in Burma is dire and it is immediate.

The leader of Burma has been internationally celebrated in the past for her commitment to peace and to her fellow man. If any of that love of humankind can still be found in the Government of Burma, it must act now. The least it can do is allow humanitarian

groups access to those who are suffering. It costs the Government nothing to allow food to the starving, medical care to the wounded and psychological services to the sexually abused. The world is watching and waiting for Burma to act. What we have seen so far is cruel and barbaric. To top it off, it has the gall to blame the media. Unhindered media access is vitally important. Journalists, like the two imprisoned Reuters reporters, are an indispensable source of information.

I also call on the Secretary-General to quickly appoint a special envoy for Burma, and I call on the Burmese Government to allow a United Nations fact-finding mission and the Special Rapporteur into the country. Without the media and United Nations personnel in Burma to shed light on the crimes being committed, there is no hope for justice for the victims.

We are grateful to the people and Government of Bangladesh for hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees. We understand the burden that it creates, and we ask Bangladesh to continue to work closely with UNHCR and other international organizations to ensure that repatriations of refugees are voluntary. We ask that it continue to ensure the safety and security of both those who choose to relocate and those who do not. But, in the end, real progress depends on an end to the terror and the killing. We cannot expect nor should we ask refugees to return to Burma until it is safe to do so. They must be confident that they will not fall victim to the same horrors that drove them from their homes in the first place. Right now, those refugees do not have that confidence. Many are too scared to return to their country.

The Government of Burma — and the Government of Burma alone — has the power and the moral obligation to correct that. It must create the conditions to assure refugees that they can safely return to their villages and their homes. Burma and Bangladesh have had substantive discussions on repatriation and that is a good thing. But we can talk forever and not make progress, as long as the military and the Government continue to make living in Burma a death sentence for the Rohingya people.

I am profoundly grateful to my colleagues from the United Kingdom for arranging this meeting today. There are powerful forces at work trying to cover up the unspeakable horror taking place in Burma, but we owe it to both the victims and the rest of the Burmese people to demand transparency, access and accountability. We need to honour the bravery of the Buddhist village elder who provided Reuters with horrific photographs of the atrocities at Inn Din because, in his words, "I do not want it to happen like that in the future." We need to honour his hope for a better Burma, one in which such behaviour is not tolerated against any person or group.

Unfortunately, the Security Council has so far failed in its responsibility to act in response to the clear threat to international peace and security that has resulted from recent events in northern Rakhine state. We cannot look the other way in this situation. What happened and continues to happen in Burma is not okay. The Council must hold the military accountable for its actions and exert pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi to acknowledge that those horrific acts are taking place in her country. No more excuses.

I urge my colleagues to seize this opportunity to end our inaction and live up to our responsibilities as members of the Security Council. I call on all nations to join the United States to do more than just demanding an end to the atrocities in Burma, and to actually take the steps we know are needed to put the crisis on the path leading towards a solution.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their excellent briefings on the current situation in Myanmar and for the work that they are doing in managing the crisis in that country.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of this meeting dedicated to the crisis in Myanmar, a country in which one of the most serious humanitarian crises of our time is taking place. Today it is estimated that almost 888,000 internally displaced and refugees, most of whom are women and children, are facing a major humanitarian crisis. That situation calls for special attention from the international community, in particular the United Nations, which must take appropriate measures aimed at finding a lasting and sustainable solution to the daily tragedy that those segments of the population are living.

I would like to structure my statement on three main points, namely, the return of Rohingya refugees to their country, the question of the fight against impunity with regard to serious human rights violations and the need to maintain peace and security in the region.

With regard to the first point, my delegation believes that the return of the Rohingya people to their homes of origin is a moral obligation for the international community. Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about recent developments concerning the reportedly constant flow of people from Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh. My delegation therefore calls on the international community, as well as all other actors, to act so as to find concrete solutions to the crisis, in particular by providing needed humanitarian assistance and facilitating the voluntary return of all those displaced back to their land in a dignified and safe manner pursuant to presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, issued on 6 November 2017. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the agreement of 23 November 2017 between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh on the repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine state. Accordingly, my country now calls on the two States to take all appropriate measures for the effective and successful implementation of that agreement for the well-being of the Rohingya people, and on all other actors, in particular the international community, to support those countries in their efforts.

My country is concerned about limitations that have been placed upon humanitarian access, the freedom of expression of the media and the freedom of movement of independent observers. Needless to say, such obstacles cast doubt on the possibility of a safe return of refugees. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire commends the Government and the people of Bangladesh for the humanitarian commitment that they are showing towards those who have been affected by the crisis. My country encourages the Government of Myanmar to make greater efforts to ensure peace and security in the country and improve the living conditions of all segments of its population. Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the commitment of the Government of Myanmar to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Concrete solutions that ensure a decent and sustainable future for returnees are needed as part of an approach based on the inclusive economic and social development of Rakhine state.

With regard to the fight against impunity, my delegation condemns the serious human rights violations, the incitement leading to religious and ethnic hatred and the violence directed against Rohingya people. Côte d'Ivoire is particularly concerned about recent reports concerning the summary and extrajudicial executions of Rohingya individuals by the Government armed forces, militias and self-defence groups. My country urges the Myanmar authorities to halt such acts and bring their perpetrators to justice.

With regard to the third point — the need to maintain peace and security in the region — my delegation condemns the attacks perpetrated by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army against the Myanmar security forces. Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about how terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State might exploit the situation under the pretext of solidarity with Muslim communities, thereby leading to destabilizing terrorist activities.

Before concluding, my delegation encourages a regional approach to resolving the crisis. In that regard, it welcomes the actions taken by the States of the region, in particular the mission by the Parliamentarians for Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which visited refugees on the ground. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the international community to play a decisive role in supporting Myanmar in its search for peace and stability, as well as in its national reconstruction efforts.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča for their briefings, which, unfortunately, continue to illustrate the very troubling humanitarian situation of the Rohingya people. We hope that the situation will continue to improve since the Council meeting (see S/PV.8085) on 6 November 2017 during which presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, along with other appeals, urged the Government of Myanmar to ensure that there would be no further excessive use of the military force against Rakhine state.

For the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the issue of the Rohingya people, which fundamentally dates back to the colonial Administration of the previous century and involve complex historical, national and religious factors, requires a comprehensive approach. Current objectives and temporary solutions must go hand in hand with long-term goals and the search for a solution that analyses the root causes. Poverty is a major source of instability and conflict. The international community should pay more attention to, and support the reduction of, local poverty, focus on development by alleviating

poverty and seek peace through development in order to definitively solve the problem.

The images and reports we are seeing on the situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar are truly worrying and can only be described as a humanitarian crisis. According to recent statistics, there are 680,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, while 176,000 of the Rohingya who remain in northern Rakhine suffer from severe food insecurity. That the most vulnerable population is going through such a difficult situation is undoubtedly cause for great concern, and calls for action to help the victims.

In that regard, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the Myanmar authorities to assume their responsibilities and to seek an immediate solution to the crisis that the Rohingya population is going through. Serious accusations of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities must be considered with the utmost seriousness, and an investigation must be opened in order to shed light on the situation and lead its possible perpetrators to face justice.

Assuming their responsibilities also includes ensuring peace and security in the country, especially in northern Rakhine state. That means responding to the terrorist attacks attributed to the militants of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, who deserve our strongest condemnation. The Government of Myanmar has an obligation to ensure that the population fully enjoys its rights within its territory.

In that regard, we request the Myanmar authorities to take steps to create the right conditions for the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic and religious communities in Rakhine state and to make preparations — with the necessary guarantees — to receive those who wish to return to their original places of residence. The Myanmar authorities must be prepared to manage the potential reintegration of the returnees, must ensure their rights and must contribute to rebuilding. They must intensify and promote activities that prevent the escalation of violence, restore law and order throughout the country, create normalized socioeconomic conditions and solve the refugee problem.

The Myanmar Government should make every effort to comply with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and work with the Bangladeshi authorities on the repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine state.

We urge all parties to refrain from actions that could lead to further degradation of the situation and to continue the constructive dialogue at all levels without politicizing it. That is the only possible way to comprehensively solve the complicated problem of the Muslim minority in Myanmar. Equatorial Guinea supports all efforts to facilitate interreligious interactions within the country by involving the spiritual leaders of all religions.

We take note of the contributions and actions of Bangladesh, which, despite its difficulties, provides timely humanitarian aid and welcomes those in need. Equatorial Guinea greatly appreciates the generosity, efforts and contributions of Bangladesh. The international community should provide additional assistance to Bangladesh commensurate with its needs.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that, in order to reach a concerted solution in the mass movement of the population across the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, we must first secure the goodwill of both countries. The two parties have met a number of times and are expected to sign a repatriation agreement aimed at finding an acceptable solution to both parties. This issue must be adequately addressed by Bangladesh and Myanmar through bilateral channels.

The international community, including the Council, must offer favourable conditions and create an adequate environment to promote bilateral consultations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. We are convinced that, with the support and assistance of the international community, Bangladesh and Myanmar will surely be able to improve the situation and find ways to solve the problem through negotiation.

I would like to conclude my comments on behalf of Equatorial Guinea by referring to the offer of support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to both the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh and to the refugees in finding a long-term solution that would benefit the refugees, the authorities of both countries, the host community of Bangladesh and all the communities of Rakhine state. The implementation modalities of the agreement, which should be in accordance with international standards, would contribute significantly to resolving the problem.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to begin by thanking our briefers, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo

Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their informative briefings.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation of the displaced Rohingya community. It is up to the international community to maintain the humanitarian and development assistance to both Rohingya refugee camps situated in Bangladesh and to Myanmar's institutions, which provide assistance to Rakhine state.

We would like to see the report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the Human Rights Council, which is due in March. However, we regret that the Fact-Finding Mission was not allowed to visit the country. While we appreciate the agreement concerning the voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya community and understand the desire to proceed rapidly, we can support only returns that are safe, voluntary and dignified. We understand that at this moment, regrettably, there are no such conditions on the ground for returns. However, it is the responsibility of the Government of Myanmar to ensure that the displaced Rohingya will have a safe place to return to and live in peace. We believe that foreign humanitarian assistance will be key in fulfilling that obligation.

We are of the view that the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations remain essential to addressing the ongoing security, human rights, development and humanitarian crisis situation in Rakhine state. We hope that the Government will implement them without delay.

Poland remains ready, through the new United Nation system, to provide the assistance needed to find a long-term solution to the crisis for all communities in the Rakhine state. We are deeply troubled by the news of the existence of previously unreported mass graves near the village of Gudar Pyin. We have to remain focused on making sure that the perpetrators of such criminal acts are held accountable. We urge the Myanmar authorities to cooperate with an independent and credible investigation into allegations of atrocities in northern Rakhine.

In a situation of this kind, the most vulnerable suffer the most. The situation of Rohingya women and children is heartbreaking. We urge the Government to fully comply with its national action plan to address the grave violations against children, particularly to end and prevent the recruitment or use of children in the national army. Furthermore, we urge the authorities to grant access to the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting to armed groups listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/1099).

In the light of these circumstances, we wish to recall the importance of the freedom of the press and the need to comply with resolution 2222 (2015), on the protection of journalists in armed conflict. I wish to underline that Poland and the European Union are strongly committed to supporting Myanmar's democratic transition, peace, national reconciliation and socioeconomic development.

I wish to thank and commend the Government and the people of Bangladesh who have opened their borders and homes by providing relief and refuge to the Rohingya community. I would also like to repeat what has already been said in this Chamber multiple times: history will judge our actions as well as our inaction.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): On behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, I wish to express our deep sympathies and condolences to the delegation of the Russian Federation as well as the families of the victims of the plane crash near Moscow on Sunday, 11 February, which resulted in the loss of lives of all 65 passengers and six crew members on board.

I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, for their updates on the latest developments in Myanmar and the plight of Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh. At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its grave concern with regard to the Myanmar Government's inhuman treatment of the Rohingya population and its sluggishness in addressing the root causes of the problem.

My delegation has noted the signing, on 23 November, of the memorandum of understanding between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the voluntary return of refugees to Myanmar. We also praise the work done by joint working group of Myanmar and Bangladesh on implementing the memorandum, with the timeline for the return of refugees commencing on 23 January and designed to run over a period of two years. However, the repatriation process has been postponed due to the difficulties in compiling and verifying the list of people to be repatriated and the absence of necessary safeguards for potential returnees.

We see the value in the request of Bangladesh that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be involved in verifying the resettlement process to guarantee that conditions are met on the ground for the return of refugees. The Rohingya refugees have no trust or confidence in the sincerity of the Myanmar authorities' actions. Indeed, there can be no durable or lasting solution for the return of Rohingya refugees without addressing the questions of the restoration of their rights and freedoms, including access to education and employment, freedom of movement and a path towards a just and sustainable solution to the issue of citizenship.

I would like to reiterate that Kazakhstan is of the firm view that unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the affected population is crucial in Myanmar. We therefore call on the Government of Myanmar to allow unfettered and safe access to United Nations agencies that can help to provide emergency assistance and alleviate the suffering of the victimized population. Kazakhstan commends the efforts of UNHCR, which has airlifted 1,500 metric tons of emergency life-saving aid to Bangladesh to assist 250,000 refugees and helped to develop the Kutupalong extension, a new site near Kutupalong refugee camp.

We laud the hospitality of the Government of Bangladesh, which is helping refugees and providing them with shelter, medical care, food and other forms of assistance. We also find it very inspiring how other States, international organizations and individuals are giving a helping hand to those in need regardless of distance, views or religion. The Government of Kazakhstan has allocated a half a million dollars of official humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh.

We note the efforts of the Myanmar Government to stabilize the situation in northern Rakhine and organize the visit for the diplomatic corps residing in Myanmar to the reception centres at Taung Pyo Letwe and Nga Khu Ya as well as a transit centre, which are all steps in right direction. At the same time, Kazakhstan expresses its deep concern about the revelation of mass graves in the country. The journalists who reported on the graves should be released and allowed to work freely. We also take note of the statement by the spokesperson of the Government of Myanmar that "actions according to the law" would be taken against those members of the security forces who killed 10 Rohingya men in the northern Rakhine village of Inn Din.

My delegation believes that it is necessary for the Government of Myanmar to conduct credible investigations into gross human rights violations, and a United Nations fact-finding mission should be organized so that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Only through full disclosure of the atrocities and by taking action against those responsible can we expect the Rohingyas to have the confidence they need to return home and for trust among all communities to be re-established at the national level, thereby deterring the recurrence of these kinds of violence in future. Finally, my delegation is of the view that the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission are valuable and that their full implementation will be necessary to restore intercommunal harmony, sustainable peace, stability and prosperity in Rakhine state.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, for their briefings on the situation in the Rakhine state of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Despite some positive developments on the ground, we reiterate our deep concern about the continuing effects generated by the violence perpetrated in August 2017 against several minority ethnic groups in Rakhine state, in particular against the Muslim ethnic group, the Rohingyas. We are struck by the fact that, according to the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dated 9 February 2018, the number of refugees has increased from 640,000 to 688,000 people, which means that, since the last time the Security Council considered the situation, in December last year (see S/2017/8133), 48,000 people were forced to flee to Bangladesh as a result of the absence of conditions that would guarantee their security and stability in Myanmar.

This increase in the number of displaced persons and refugees implies a more serious challenge, in the light of the precariousness to which these people must be exposed, given that refugee camps in Bangladesh are at the mercy of such potential climatic events as floods or landslide that have the potential to worsen the already complex humanitarian situation. In addition, the outbreak of diphtheria in refugee camps in the town of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh continues to be a matter of concern, as the World Health Organization has

reported more than 5,000 clinically recorded cases and 37 deaths from the disease as of 3 February this year.

Furthermore, in order to prevent the further worsening of conditions, it is crucial that wide and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance be guaranteed to all the towns where internally displaced persons are found, and we therefore call upon the relevant parties, in particular the Government of Myanmar, to fulfil their obligations. In that regard, we want to emphasize the initial willingness that the Government of Myanmar has shown to work with the various United Nations agencies, and we urge it to continue to greatly expand its coordination efforts.

We have taken note of the agreements signed between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in November of last year and this January aimed at launching the process for the Rohingya refugees' return, as well as the coordination that both countries have begun on exchanging the information and documentation needed to achieve that goal. However, in our view it will be essential to ensure the establishment of conditions that will enable the refugees to make a voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin, and to make quite sure that there is no replication of the conditions that would make their return one of isolation and confinement in areas where they do not belong.

We want to emphasize the efforts of Myanmar's ministerial committee to start work on implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, and we encourage it to continue its best efforts to comply with them and produce concrete and lasting results. In that regard, we reiterate our call for the continuation and intensification of the investigations needed to identify those responsible for the serious violations of human rights committed against the Rohingya population and to bring them to justice to answer for their actions with no impunity, as was established in the Council's 6 November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22).

Bolivia would like to emphasize once again that there is no alternative to dialogue for resolving this crisis, and for that, the parties must commit all their efforts to implementing strategies conducive to negotiation, mediation, consultations and the exercise of good offices and refrain from resorting to rhetoric that may provoke confrontation or violence. We also reiterate that if we are to achieve a stable and sustainable solution to the issue, we must consider the root causes of the conflict.

Lastly, my delegation wants to highlight the willingness and spirit of brotherhood that the Government and the people of Bangladesh have shown in dealing with this crisis. We call on regional organizations, and the international community in general, to continue their valuable collaboration on the efforts to resolve this sensitive situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their substantive briefings. The complex, multifaceted topics they touched on require a painstaking and consistent approach on the part of the international community and thorough and impartial study by experts. Any labelling or attempts to use contradictory and subjective media reports, often hastily put together, to identify the guilty and condemn them only make it harder for us to arrive at a solution.

In our opinion, the situation in the Rakhine national region, including its northern areas adjacent to Bangladesh, remains difficult but in general under control. The Myanmar authorities' planned social and economic development efforts there have in large part contributed to that, and steps are being taken to create special economic zones in the region. In the town of Maungdaw, in particular, the central market, which has more than 400 trade outlets, has reopened, and 16 closed-circuit television cameras have been installed for security and monitoring purposes. It is important to note that the central and regional authorities are prioritizing housing construction and modernization of road and transport infrastructure. In northern Rakhine, one transit and two reception centres for receiving refugees have been built, with 640 shelters that can provide temporary housing for more than 30,000 refugees.

Regarding the international community attention to the efforts in Naypyidaw to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan, we commend the work of the group of advisers under the Myanmar ministerial committee led by Thailand's former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Surakiart Sathirathai.

The expanded access to Rakhine state being granted to foreign observers is a positive step. In

particular, a number of groups of journalists have visited the region in recent weeks, including employees of Russian television. On 6 February, representatives of neighbouring states visited Rakhine, and the authorities organized a similar trip for representatives of the local diplomatic corps on 9 February. They visited the Kanyin Chaung economic zone and Ngakunya settlement, as well as refugee transit and reception camps. An inspection of the border zone was even arranged for the first of those groups.

The situation regarding the repatriation of refugees continues to be very difficult, but we see some positive signs there too. We note the steps taken by Naypyidaw and Dhaka to implement their agreement, signed on 23 November 2017, on a programme for the return of persons displaced from Rakhine, including the convening on 15 and 16 January of the first meeting of the bilateral working group and its adoption of a plan for the return of Muslims who have fled to Bangladesh. In our view, the document has laid a foundation for solving the most difficult issues related to refugees' repatriation to Myanmar. We believe that in the current circumstances it is important to facilitate a resolution of the Rakhine situation, focusing on practical assistance to the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We would like to emphasize that the Myanmar refugee situation is a issue of bilateral relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh that should be resolved through appropriate consultations. We realize that the Dhaka authorities are bearing a tremendous burden with regard to hosting and sheltering this huge number of refugees on their territory, one beyond the capacities of any single country, and the international community must therefore provide Bangladesh with all the support it needs in this area.

However, we are very concerned about the attempts to delay a resolution of the repatriation issue on the pretext that Myanmar lacks the conditions for the safe, dignified and sustainable return and resettlement of repatriates. Needless to say, their living conditions must comply with humanitarian standards, but the arguments of those who are creating artificial obstacles to the process and inciting refugees by fuelling their anxiety are unacceptable. We will continue to urge all the parties to refrain from violence, emphasize the importance of respecting Myanmar's sovereignty and work to resolve the multilayered and complex problems in Rakhine by exclusively political means, through a dialogue between Naypyidaw and Dhaka and between representatives of all nationalities and faiths.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Kuwait.

I would first like to express our condolences to the families of the victims of the plane accident that occurred in Russia on Sunday.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their briefings.

The world is following the proceedings of our meeting in the Security Council today and expects us to persist in our principled position supporting the principles of international law and human values above any political considerations, so as to deal with one of the worst tragedies of our modern history: the tragedy that the majority-Muslim Rohingya minority continue to live.

This tragedy, which has resulted in the deaths of many innocent people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more owing to their persecution and forcible displacement, actions that can be described as ethnic cleansing. The State of Kuwait condemns and denounces these actions, which contravene international norms and principles, carried out in Rakhine state in Myanmar since August and which has led to the displacement of approximately 650,000 people of the Rohingya minority. Here we emphasize the need for the Government of Myanmar to assume its primary responsibilities to protect its citizens and ensure that excessive force is not used.

Moreover, I should like to express my country's appreciation for the considerable efforts that the Government of Bangladesh is making in hosting these innocent people on its territory. Last October, the State of Kuwait co-chaired the donors conference for the Rohingya refugee crisis and pledged $15 million. That amount, contributed by official and civil-society bodies, is part of Kuwait's efforts to alleviate the severity of the tragedy and of international efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingya refugees.

This tragedy has put an entire generation of children at risk of losing everything and of not receiving an education which determine their future, or any medical services or health care — not to mention the destruction of their homes and villages.

Since the Security Council issued its presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, on the situation in Myanmar on 6 November 2017, we have been closely following the ongoing developments in Myanmar. We have taken note of the three agreements signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar, which are aimed at ensuring the voluntary return of refugees to their homes. Such voluntary return cannot begin until additional, explicit confidence-building measures have been taken in order to ensure a safe return to and a dignified life in Rakhine state. Here I would like to refer to some of the measures that must be taken before there can be a voluntary return of refugees.

The Government of Myanmar must take all measures necessary to ensure the immediate cessation of violence and prevent the excessive use of force against civilians. Refrain from establishing new refugee camps for displaced persons in the northern part of Rakhine state. Adopt all measures to combat any incitement to violence or hatred, and restore peace and harmony among the various sects under the rule of law. Allow access to United Nations agencies and its partners and allow freedom of movement to all those in Rakhine state in a safe and unhindered manner. Involve the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the bilateral talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

These are some of the measures that we deem important and that must be taken before the refugees can return home. Moreover, we believe that these measures must be accompanied by other arrangements, most importantly a call upon the Government of Myanmar to take all measures necessary to establish peace and harmony among the various communities through dialogue and within a comprehensive national process for peace and reconciliation in which all segments of society can take part. It must eliminate the root causes of the plight of the Rohingya minority without discrimination and regardless of ethnicity or religion. Moreover, they must be granted their inherent right to nationality, as confirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution calling for the granting of full citizenship rights to the Rohingya minority (resolution 72/248).

In conclusion, I would like to end my statement today with a verse from the Holy Koran in which the exalted and Almighty Allah The great and Almighty decrees that:

> "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other ... Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

This holy verse confirms that Islam is a religion of love and peace, and opens the way to human unity, without any intolerance based on race, colour or language. We here may speak different languages and have different customs and views, but once we sit in this Chamber we all become responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council, when united, has taken historic and memorable positions. I invite all present to once again show our ability to overcome all political divisions and intensify our efforts to take measures and decisions that would grant those innocent people the chance to live and offer them a safe, dignified and free life.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for allowing my delegation to participate in this meeting. My delegation wishes to congratulate you on the Kuwaiti presidency of the Council. I am confident that under your able leadership, the Council's important debates will bear fruitful results. I assure you of our support and cooperation.

I also thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča and High Commissioner Grandi for their briefings on the situation in Myanmar.

We appreciate the constructive approach adopted by the Secretary-General and the United Nations in our engagement. We will continue to cooperate with the United Nations.

In this connection, we are glad that the visit of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten to Myanmar last December was very positive. We are working closely with her Office for further cooperation.

My delegation is keeping in close touch with members of the Council as well as with the Secretariat to maintain a constructive partnership in the spirit of cooperation.

Since the issuance of the presidential statement on the situation in Myanmar on 6 November last (S/PRST/2017/22), Myanmar has made great strides

towards the restoration of the rule of law, peace and stability, and preparations for the repatriation of displaced persons from the Maungdaw area. The implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has gained momentum in the process of promoting sustainable peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have made significant progress in our bilateral efforts for the repatriation of displaced persons. After the signing on 23 November last of the memorandum of understanding on the arrangement on the return of displaced persons, on 19 December 2017 the terms of reference for the joint working group were signed; the first meeting of the group was held on 15 January. The physical arrangement for repatriation agreement was signed by the two sides on 16 January. According to that agreement, the repatriation process was scheduled to commence on 23 January. The returnees will be received at two reception centres and then temporarily accommodated at a camp before permanent settlement.

As an initial step, Myanmar will receive 300 returnees a day to ensure a smooth and safe return. The number will be increased based on the progress of the return and will be reviewed in three months. The number of transit camps and reception centres may be increased based on requirements as the repatriation process progresses.

In the process of repatriation, Myanmar will draw on the services of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as needed and at the appropriate time. Recently, on 5 and 6 February, UNHCR conducted its second workshop on voluntary repatriation in Myanmar.

In an effort to expedite the implementation of the repatriation process, Myanmar provided to Bangladesh a list of 500 Hindus and 750 Muslims, verified as Myanmar residents, to be included in the first batch of repatriation.

In addition, on 30 January the Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the Bangladeshi side with information relating to a resettlement plan, the provision of livelihood assistance, access to basic services, and safety arrangements for verified returnees.

We have made the necessary preparations and are now ready to receive the first group of returnees. We will continue to work in close consultation and cooperation with Bangladesh for the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of displaced persons in accordance with the bilateral agreement.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Council that the Minister of Home Affairs of Myanmar will be visiting Bangladesh on 15 February to discuss with his counterpart matters relating to cooperation in repatriation and to find a solution to the problem of people being stranded on the zero line of the border. Officials from both sides of the border will also be meeting at the border on the same day to encourage people to return to their villages, because the building of houses or habitations on the zero line of the common border is prohibited in the boundary agreement. We appreciate the traditional good-neighbourly relationship with Bangladesh and we are confident that we will be able to overcome all problems arising between the two neighbours with a spirit of friendship and cooperation.

In recent days, members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of United Nations agencies — including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank — have been given access to the Maungdaw areas to observe the preparations for repatriation and the situation on the ground. The Government has arranged a day trip for all diplomatic corps members residing in Myanmar, including United Nations agency representatives, to Rakhine state in three groups. The first and second groups went on 6 and 9 February, respectively. The third group will be going on 15 February. Likewise, visiting dignitaries, such as the Foreign Minister of Japan and the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, have also visited the area with their accompanying media.

We are fully aware that the Government has the primary responsibility to protect its own people. As lives in the affected areas, especially the Maungdaw area, return to normalcy, the police forces have largely taken over the security responsibility in most parts of Maungdaw district. Although no major clashes with terrorists have been reported in the past six months, there is always a threat posed by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army terrorists, who are taking refuge among innocent people. They will take every opportunity to undermine law and order and public security. They will not hesitate to use their brutal tactics of intimidation and killing of innocent people who want a peaceful life in harmony with other communities in Rakhine. The

recent media reports of the killing of two camp leaders from refugee camps in Bangladesh sent a warning to those who want to return to their villages.

Under such circumstances, and in order to establish the rule of law and sustain peace and security, the capacities of the security forces must be strengthened. It is regrettable that, at a time when we most need international support for building the capacities of our security personnel, some countries have adopted new restrictions and sanctions on Myanmar with regard to cooperation in the security sector. Such actions could have negative effects on the maintenance of peace and stability in conflict areas.

On humanitarian assistance, the Government and the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine have been providing food and household needs to all communities in Rakhine state, in addition to building infrastructure and increasing business activities for the economic development of the region. The Red Cross Movement continues to play an important role in providing services to address the urgent need of humanitarian assistance in affected areas.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management is also actively participating in the Government-led mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance. We highly appreciate ASEAN's understanding, support and constructive engagement in our efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Rakhine issue.

The Government of Myanmar has embraced the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State as a road map to resolve the root causes of the problem of Rakhine state and achieve sustainable peace and development for all. The Government is committed to implementing the recommendations made by the Advisory Commission, as well as other recommendations made by the Maungdaw Region Investigation Commission. The Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State has begun taking steps towards their implementation. The Committee has recently published its first report on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations.

The Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Development has been spearheading various projects with great momentum in the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission. One of the most significant developments in that regard was the formation on 14 December of a 10-member advisory board to the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State, headed by Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand. The primary purpose of the board is to provide an external perspective and advice to the Committee for a more effective and efficient implementation of recommendations.

The board has also already provided five points of advice to the Implementation Committee as preliminary reflections. The points made by the board concern the sustainability of implementation projects, the wider participation of United Nations agencies in the repatriation and resettlement process, and the granting of full humanitarian access, among others. We are encouraged by the board's conviction that constructive and positive work can be done to help bring peace, reconciliation and economic progress to all communities in Rakhine state.

Concerning allegations of human rights violations, the Government of Myanmar has always made its position very clear that it will not condone any action of abuse. If there is concrete evidence, action will be taken against the transgressor in accordance with the law, no matter who or what he is. With regard to the Reuters report of December last year on the finding of 10 bodies in a cemetery in Inn Din, Maungdaw, the Tatmadaw immediately formed a high-level enquiry team and conducted an investigation of the incident.

It was found that 10 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army members had been arrested by security forces on 1 September 2017, soon after the terrorist attacks on 25 August. The next day, 2 September, they were executed and buried in the village cemetery without being handed over to the police. Therefore, actions are being taken against 16 individuals, including army and police officers and some villagers who acted in violation of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement. The action taken on the part of the Tatmadaw is a positive step forward in taking responsibility, and deserves encouragement.

Recently, the Associated Press and the BBC reported widely on alleged mass graves in the village of Gu Dar Pyin, in Buthidaung township. The Rakhine state Government sent a 17-member inspection team to the

village, comprised of regional administrative officials, local Rakhine and Muslim community elders, doctors, immigration officers and security officers. According to the interviews and area inspections, no mass grave was found in the reported area. Moreover, the local elders confirmed that there had been no such incidents in the village. However, the Rakhine state Government is now extending the investigation to nearby villages. The Government of Myanmar will continue to ensure accountability for all crimes committed, as no one is above the law.

The case of two Reuters reporters has attracted much attention in recent weeks. Myanmar recognizes the freedom of the press, and they were not arrested for reporting. The two reporters are charged under the Official Secrets Act for illegally possessing confidential Government documents. Every citizen is bound by the existing law of land. It is important that the action of a journalist also be within the bounds of the law. In accordance with judicial procedure, they have full legal rights as defendants in the course of legal proceedings.

Achieving durable peace, harmony and development in Rakhine state will be contingent on nationwide peace and the success of the democratic transition of Myanmar. The greatest national endeavour for Myanmar today is to forge lasting peace. Without peace, stability and the rule of law, the country will not be able to realize its ultimate goal of building a genuine democratic federal union that will guarantee security, freedom and progress for all people.

To that end, the previous Government initiated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with ethnic armed groups to sustain peace. Eight out of about twenty armed groups signed the Agreement during the previous administration. I am pleased to inform the Council that today, 13 February, another two ethnic groups — the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union — have signed the Agreement in Naypyidaw, bringing the total number of signatories to ten. The People's Republic of China, India, Japan, Thailand, the European Union and the United Nations have also signed the Agreement as international witnesses.

The 21st Century Panglong Conference is the forum bringing together all stakeholders to undertake political dialogue towards peace and lay the foundation for a democratic federal union. The first session of the Panglong Peace Conference, held in 2016, was the most inclusive peace conference in Myanmar's history. The second session of the Conference took place in May 2017 and reached an agreement on part 1 of the 37-point Pyidaungsu Accord, which will constitute part of the basis for a future democratic federal constitution. Preparations are now under way for the third session of the Panglong Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the Myanmar Government's sincere appreciation to all our friends around the world and to the United Nations for supporting the peace process. We hope that we can count on the continued support and encouragement of the international community in our efforts for lasting peace, sustainable development and democratic nation-building.

The current humanitarian crisis, which involves the Muslim people of Rakhine state, did not result from communal violence, as happened in 2012. It is the consequence of terrorist attacks on security posts, which triggered the security response of the Government forces. Such attacks were a clear and real threat to the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar. The matter is not a religious issue, as some people are trying to portray. The majority of Muslims in other areas across Myanmar have lived peacefully and in harmony with people of different faiths throughout history.

The challenges facing Rakhine state include poverty, resource competition, human rights, citizenship and immigration perspectives, to name a few. There is no easy quick fix to those highly complex challenges. Ultimately, it is up to the people of Myanmar to determine how to achieve a peaceful and prosperous Rakhine state. The solution must come from within. It must not be imposed from outside.

We appreciate the concern expressed by our friends and welcome the constructive cooperation of the international community. We need a solution to solve the problem. We would not allow action that would exacerbate the problem. In the policymaking process, we should not become hostage to the one-sided media and activists. Important judgments and policy decisions should be based on a careful examination of the information.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation to the members of the Security Council who have demonstrated an understanding of the complex challenges that we face today. We are grateful for their support and encouragement, which

we will continue to need. We believe that only mutual understanding and constructive cooperation will bring about positive results. The Government of Myanmar is determined to overcome all the challenges with the full support and contribution of the entire population of Myanmar. We will not allow the immediate challenges to undermine or to delay our ultimate goal of building a fully democratic federal union, with lasting peace and sustainable development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We thank the brotherly delegation of Kuwait for convening this open meeting of the Security Council. We are grateful to the Council members that supported the call for this meeting. We appreciate the comprehensive briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs.

Bangladesh continues to acknowledge the international community's support in providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to more than 1 million people forcibly displaced from Myanmar's Rakhine state. In the coming months, we will further strengthen efforts to improve shelters in preparation for the onset of the monsoon. We are providing informal education for children and adolescents in order to develop enabling skills and expanding spaces accessible to women and girls in order to help to further amplify their voices in decisions that impact on their future.

We appreciate the Council's sustained engagement through the implementation of presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, adopted by consensus last year. Among other priorities, it is evident that our shared objective is to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the people forcibly displaced from Myanmar's Rakhine state to their original homes, or somewhere close. That critically depends on their perception of the situation on the ground to be conducive to their safe and sustainable return, with their rights restored and without the fear of reprisal. Our experience with the verification process for return so far makes it apparent that that has not been the case, as also recounted by the High Commissioner for Refugees. A series of emerging investigative reports about evidence of targeted killings and the discovery of mass graves in Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine state last year also perhaps explains the prevailing reluctance to repatriation among those forcibly displaced.

We are currently in discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the Rohingya. We continue to urge the Myanmar authorities to involve UNHCR in the repatriation process in order to build confidence and trust among the returnees. We are also working closely with other relevant United Nations agencies and humanitarian actors to deal with the daunting challenges to provide succour to the Rohingya.

As envisaged in the bilateral documents concluded between our two Governments, it would be helpful to see tangible progress in realizing the commitments made by the Myanmar side, including with regard to implementing the practical and far-reaching recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by Mr. Kofi Annan. However, on that particular aspect, we have yet to see any specific results beyond a professed intention in the form of setting up a number of high-level entities. As recommended by the Advisory Commission, without a comprehensive rights-based approach, finding a lasting peaceful solution to the situation in Rakhine state will continue to pose a challenge to the Myanmar authorities.

One major restraining factor to voluntary return among the forcibly displaced is the fact that, despite Myanmar's claims to the contrary, the influx of the Rohingya into Bangladesh continues unabated to date. According to reports, the remaining Rohingya based in northern Rakhine state continue to cross the border to escape from hunger, hostility and abuse. In only the first 10 days of this month, a total of 7,500 new arrivals have been recorded on the Bangladesh side. Those latest entrants have cited the following as grounds for their continued exodus: persistent threats from both security forces and armed vigilantes and the occurrence of sporadic and indiscriminate violence; an acute food shortage and forced starvation due to the constraints imposed on harvesting their crops; the burning down of and denial of access to local markets, the cut-off of essential supplies, theft of livestock and restriction on humanitarian assistance; the forced closure of businesses and a lack of livelihood options; and the alleged abduction of girls and young women, as well as sexual violence and enslavement.

That unfolding situation is largely corroborated by the case of approximately 6,000 displaced Rohingya, who are currently staying in no man's land or on the zero line of the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar. So far, those people have refrained from entering Bangladesh and have reportedly expressed their willingness to return to their own villages in safety and to gain access to their lands and other livelihood opportunities. They have also reportedly asked for the restoration of their basic rights, including freedom of movement. Regrettably, however, the Myanmar authorities appear to have opted for compelling those people to leave the area and have proposed verification as a precondition for their return despite the fact that they have not crossed over to the other side of the border. We reiterate that, given the current situation on the ground, the early resettlement of those people from no man's land could in fact work as a crucial test for rebuilding the confidence to return among the forcibly displaced people in Bangladesh.

In order to carry out advocacy among the prospective returnees, Bangladesh has sought information from Myanmar about the preparations made in Rakhine state with regard to the rebuilding of villages, resettlement plans, the provision of livelihood assistance, access to basic services and safety arrangements, as envisaged in the arrangement signed between our two Governments last month. In response, the Myanmar authorities have shared information related to the construction of two reception centres and a transit camp on their side of the border. The repatriation process was scheduled to begin on 23 January. The process in fact started by establishing joint working groups on 15 January.

The prospective returnees have made it clear that they do not expect to go back to Myanmar to stay in camps. They would like to have assurance from the international community about the possibility of the following: first, resettlement in their original villages, not in closed camps; secondly, the restoration of their agricultural land and business ventures; thirdly, the right to cultivate and harvest their land and to run their business ventures; fourthly, the right to traditional fishing; fifthly, access to local markets; and sixthly, freedom of movement to conduct a normal life.

A number of forcibly displaced people in Bangladesh have also put forward claims for compensation for the arson and damage to their homes and property during the most recent cycles of violence. In the aftermath of the arson, there have been reports of confiscation of land and abandoned property by the local authorities, which understandably acts as a deterrent to return. There have also been reports of the bulldozing and clearing of villages in northern Rakhine state that would not only eliminate features of recognition to establish ownership rights, but would also seek to wipe out any remaining proof or evidence of alleged atrocities committed against the forcibly displaced people.

It remains a matter of concern that the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission continues to be denied access to Rakhine state. It is imperative that demonstrable efforts be made to ensure accountability for alleged crimes as part of efforts to heal the trauma suffered by the Rohingya and restore their confidence in the possibility of sustainable return. It is a matter of ongoing concern that northern Rakhine state remains out of the reach of international media and that very little humanitarian access to the affected people is allowed through relevant United Nations agencies and their local and international partners.

As recommended by the Council, Bangladesh remains engaged in good faith with Myanmar to create a situation conducive to the sustainable return of the Rohingya and other displaced communities. We have based our pronouncements and approach only on facts and steered clear of vilifying any individual or the friendly people of Myanmar. Even though the Rohingya humanitarian crisis is often projected as a bilateral issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar, it needs to be acknowledged that the present crisis is the result of systematic discriminatory and abusive policies pursued by the Myanmar authorities over decades. Our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina therefore categorically said in her statement at the General Assembly last year, "The crisis has its root in Myanmar and its solution has to be found in Myanmar".

To that end, we urge the Security Council to act as the custodian of the process on behalf of the international community. Council members have once again demonstrated their readiness to do so by offering a number of constructive recommendations that we hope the Myanmar authorities will duly acknowledge and act upon. We are confident that the Secretary-General's Special Envoy will be able to serve as a conduit for the international community's meaningful engagement with Myanmar.

In this context, we reiterate our suggestion that the Council undertake a visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar

in order to witness the humanitarian situation on the ground and add momentum to the repatriation process in response to the legitimate aspirations of the Rohingya and other displaced communities. The voluntary return of forcibly displaced people can take place only under the assurance of non-criminalization, non-discrimination and sustainable resettlement and reintegration. For its part, Bangladesh will continue to seek the international community's engagement in making sure that the bilateral instruments that we have so painstakingly put in place will deliver desired results for the most persecuted minority in the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8180

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8180th meeting

Tuesday, 13 February 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Permanent Representative of Peru, in his capacity as the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Meza-Cuadra.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): In my capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism (CTC), I have the honour to update the Council on the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017) concerning the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks as requested therein.

I wish to begin by thanking the Kuwaiti presidency for including this topic on the Council's agenda.

(*spoke in English*)

As recognized by the Council, it is increasingly important to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks for the benefit of the national security, public safety and economy of States concerned, as well as the well-being and welfare of their people. Resolution 2341 (2017) therefore calls on Member States to consider developing or further improving their strategies for reducing risks to critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. That includes, inter alia, assessing and raising awareness of the relevant risks, taking preparedness measures, including effective responses to such attacks, promoting interoperability in security and consequence management, and facilitating the effective interaction of all stakeholders involved. The resolution also encourages all States to make concerted and coordinated efforts, including through international cooperation, to improve preparedness for attacks against critical infrastructure. International cooperation is particularly relevant to effectively addressing security concerns arising from threats and vulnerabilities related to increasing cross-border interdependencies of critical infrastructure among countries and sectors.

The CTC, with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), plays a key role in promoting international cooperation and identifying related gaps, vulnerabilities, trends and existing good practices. Its work includes assessment and analysis, including on trends in the area aimed at assisting the efforts of all States. In that regard, I commend CTED for its proactive engagement in that area since the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017), in particular on identifying a number of excellent initiatives, including, inter alia: the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection; the Declaration on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure from Emerging Threats, issued by the States members of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism of the Organization of American States; the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center and the assistance provided to their respective member States by the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has also published the *Good Practices Guide on Non-Nuclear Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection from Terrorist Attacks Focusing on Threats Emanating from Cyberspace*. The Global Counterterrorism Forum has also developed a set of good practices concerning the protection of soft targets in the context of counter-terrorism. CTED is developing an initiative aimed at raising awareness of the requirements under resolution 2341 (2017), and accordingly enhancing States' capacities within the framework of the Working Group on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure including Vulnerable Targets, Internet and Tourism Security of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force with a view to developing a comprehensive compendium of good practices concerning the protection of critical infrastructure. CTED has also engaged with the private sector on the issue. It notably co-chaired the related work of the World Economic Forum and promoted the need to protect critical infrastructure both in Davos and in the context of the work of the CTED-Asia Information and Communication Technology Counter-Terrorism Dialogue.

There is a need to further encourage all States to identify what constitutes critical infrastructure in their

respective national contexts. States should also develop national strategies for reducing risks and incorporate those strategies into their national counter-terrorism plans. There is a need to enhance overall international cooperation through the exchange of information, knowledge and good practices, and of ideas and research concerning critical-infrastructure protection. States bear the responsibility for the protection of critical infrastructure, but private owners of such infrastructure and soft targets must also address their security needs and reduce vulnerabilities. It is also vital that Government and the private sector share information on threats, vulnerability and measures to mitigate risks. There is a need to initiate and strengthen joint training and exercises for law enforcement aimed at strengthening their preparedness and enhancing response capacity, communication networks and early-warning mechanisms.

I should stress the importance of including other relevant Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 2309 (2016), on civil aviation, and resolution 2322 (2016), on international judicial cooperation, in our work to protect critical infrastructure. Many States continue to face significant challenges in their efforts to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2341 (2017). It is therefore important that our recommendations be taken up by our implementation partners and integrated into their work and technical assistance programmes.

The Committee and CTED will continue to assess States' implementation of resolution 2341 (2017) so as to support their work to prevent such attacks and to cooperate closely with their key partners through the regular exchange of information.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I thank Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing, as well as his leadership as the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism. We very much appreciate his work.

Over the past year, deadly terrorist attacks have killed hundreds of innocent civilians and injured countless others throughout the world, in places like the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, Las Ramblas in Barcelona, the Al-Rawda Mosque in the Sinai and the Save the Children Office in Jalalabad, to name just a few. Although we continue to destroy the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) on and off the battle fields of Iraq and Syria and shut down Al-Qaida and ISIS networks around the world, terrorists continue to evolve and adapt.

The ability of the terrorist networks to exploit weaknesses in our defences both at critical infrastructure sites and soft targets all around the world make it clear that much more must be done. That is why the United States strongly supported the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) a year ago and called upon all States to make concerted and coordinated efforts, including through international cooperation to raise awareness and expand knowledge of the danger of terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure. It is clear that Al-Qaida and ISIS operatives, including returning foreign terrorist fighters and home-grown terrorists, continue to plot against critical infrastructure, such as airports, power plants and Government facilities, despite nearly two decades of international efforts since 11 September 2001. We must better address those threats.

However, we must also not forget that such operatives continue to attack soft targets, such as sporting venues, theatres and hotels, because they have historically received far less attention than critical infrastructure, and we all have paid dearly for it. That is why we must continue to do more to assess and raise awareness of the actual risks, while taking appropriate preparedness measures, promoting better interoperability, not only within Governments and between Governments but also with the public and private sectors, and ensuring resilience to attacks. We must continue to look to the United Nations, regional and international organizations and Member States to develop and share good practices, and take all appropriate measures to manage the risk of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure and soft targets.

For instance, since the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) a year ago, the Global Counterterrorism Forum has published the Antalya Memorandum on the Protection of Soft Targets in a Counter-terrorism Context. The Antalya Memorandum contains good practices for both Government and industry on how to increase awareness and preparedness for attacks against the public spaces where we gather to dine, shop, tour and conduct business. Those good practices reflect the collective expertise of more than 60 countries and 150

public and private practitioners from law enforcement intelligence agencies, emergency management and the private sector and are applicable globally to inform and guide Government and industry in developing and refining policies and practices for soft target protection. In the United States we have incorporated the Antalya good practices into our domestic soft target security programmes. We encourage others to do the same and continue to collaborate with international partners on how to implement most effectively these good practices as a means of promoting greater global preparedness for those types of attacks.

We also pleased that both resolution 2395 (2017), renewing the mandate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), and resolution 2396 (2017) on returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters reaffirm resolution 2341 (2017) and the importance of addressing risks associated with critical infrastructure and other particularly vulnerable targets from terrorist attack. We will be looking to CTED and other United Nations and international bodies such as the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, INTERPOL and the International Organization for Migration to assist Member States in improving their efforts to implement those resolutions and facilitate needed technical assistance.

In the United States and many other countries, private companies own most of the critical infrastructure. Protecting such infrastructure is therefore a collaborative effort between the private and public sectors. In April the United States will be hosting in Japan under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum a workshop on protecting soft targets from terrorist attack, which highlights the importance of fostering public-private partnerships.

Resolution 2341 (2017) represented a significant step forward in the global response to protecting critical infrastructure from the threat of terrorist attack. Now we must take concrete steps towards increasing our vigilance and adaptability to the evolving threat to better protect our citizens from future terrorist attacks.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, established by resolution 1373 (2001), for his informative briefing, which shed light on the current status of the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017), on the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. We sincerely thank Kuwait's presidency for including such a relevant and important issue on the Security Council's agenda in February.

Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is extremely concerned about and supports the protection of critical infrastructure from potential terrorist attacks. The Government of His Excellency Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, is one of the principal investors in development and infrastructure projects of all kinds in Central Africa, which are key to making progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion. We therefore understand and acknowledge the crucial importance of protecting critical infrastructure that guarantees the distribution of drinking water and food, access to education, health sources of renewable energy, air, maritime and land transportation and financial services that sustain the economy and well-being of our people.

In that regard, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea endorses resolution 2341 (2017), which calls for the establishment of suitable national, subregional and continental mechanisms for cooperation, information-sharing and public-private partnerships for planning, preventing, managing crises and deterring potential attacks on the critical infrastructure of the countries. Similarly, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is encouraged by regional initiatives that are supported by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, as outlined in the briefing we just heard.

Nonetheless, we must point out the lack of African initiatives listed. We would therefore encourage greater cooperation with the African Union and the subregional and regional economic communities, where — as we all know — particularly complex vulnerabilities exist with regard to maintaining the progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which should lay the foundation for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the African Union Agenda 2063.

We understand that the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017) complements the objectives of the Committee and of other Council resolutions, including resolutions 1373 (2001), 2309 (2016), on civil aviation, and 2322 (2016), on international cooperation, and that mechanisms to implement the resolutions must

be incorporated into national and regional counter-terrorism strategies. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is committed, to the extent possible and in line with its national laws, to working to ensure the implementation and application of the resolutions. In order to implement effective strategies, we call on the international community to support the development of initiatives to protect critical infrastructure in Africa and the rest of the world, in particular in the most vulnerable countries. We also call on it to participate in initiatives that ensure that representatives of all social and economic sectors take part in programmes that help us to better understand terrorist threats, prevent terrorist acts and detect suspicious activities.

Let me conclude by thanking the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate for its cooperation and excellent work; the Monitoring Team on the implementation of resolution 1267 (1999) of 15 October 1999; the International Criminal Police Organization; the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, and all other bodies of the United Nations. Together, all of those organizations carry out an essential function in helping Member States to develop strategic capabilities to protect their infrastructure from terrorist attacks.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the Kuwaiti initiative to convene this debate on counter-terrorism and the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. The delegation of China thanks Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing.

Terrorism is the common enemy of all humankind. Faced with the threats of terrorism, all countries have a shared destiny. The international community should embrace the concept of a community with a shared future, closely follow new trends and characteristics in the evolution of such threats, enhance cooperation and jointly respond to terrorist threats.

First of all, in the face of all forms of terrorist threats, the international community should uphold a unified standard and enhance counter-terrorism synergy. All countries should adopt a zero-tolerance policy without differentiation, regardless of terrorist locations, justifications, target countries or tactics. Terrorists must be met with resolute measures. International counter-terrorism efforts must fully respect the sovereignty of countries concerned. Affected countries should assume the primary responsibility to combat terrorism. International cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism must be in keeping with the purposes and principles of Charter of the United Nations and promote the leading role of the United Nations and the Security Council.

Secondly, the international community should jointly respond to and address the root causes that breed terrorism. The international community should help States Members of the United Nations to achieve socioeconomic development, alleviate and eradicate poverty and conduct dialogue on an equal footing among civilizations and religions. We should refrain from linking terrorism with any specific ethnicity or religion, build a new form of international relations and construct a community with a shared future for the benefit of humankind.

Thirdly, all countries must take concrete measures to stop the movement of terrorist fighters and curb the spread of terrorist and extremist ideologies. Currently, a major challenge is the movement and return of terrorist fighters who have launched many attacks on infrastructure in their countries of origin, transit and destination. All countries should enhance border control and enforcement cooperation. The counter-terrorism bodies of the United Nations and relevant international organizations should play an important role in that effort. On the basis of respecting the sovereignty of Member States, the United Nations and relevant international bodies must respond to the specific needs of Member States and enhance the capacity-building of those countries and their ability to respond to the movement of terrorist fighters. The international community should also follow the new trends and evolution of the terrorist threat and scale up efforts to counter the use of the internet for the spread of terrorist ideologies and the commission of terrorist attacks.

Fourthly, concrete measures should be adopted to implement Council resolution 2341 (2017) and other relevant resolutions so as to protect key infrastructure from terrorist attacks. Member States should implement relevant Council resolutions, identify relevant security policies and take concrete measures with regard to any potential terrorist attack on key infrastructure as a high-risk factor, as well as establish early-warning and emergency-response mechanisms. All countries should shoulder the responsibility of ensuring the safety and security of their own infrastructure, enhance domestic legislation and bring to justice perpetrators of terrorist attacks on infrastructure. The international community

should enhance international cooperation in the field of protecting key infrastructure and help developing countries to scale up their capacity-building.

Over the past few years, the violent terrorist elements in eastern Turkistan — represented by the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) — have planned and carried out a number of terrorist attacks in China. They have also posed a serious threat to countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. Fighting the violent terrorist forces of ETIM should be part of international counter-terrorism efforts. Such forces should be met with resolute measures.

As a very important member of the international counter-terrorism alliance, China has actively participated in recent years in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and have made important contribution to international counter-terrorism efforts. Beginning in 2017 and for the next five years, China will support INTERPOL in carrying out three joint global initiatives annually to combat terrorism and organized cybercrime.

China supports the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities in their efforts to enhance cooperation with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, and will provide counter-terrorism supplies and capacity-building assistance to developing countries, within the scope of their capabilities. China stands ready to work together with all countries to jointly respond to the threat of terrorism and to maintain peace and stability.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to express appreciation to Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017), on the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, one year after its adoption. We found the briefing to be very comprehensive and informative.

With the growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism, the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to terrorist attacks has indeed been a source of great concern. The devastating economic and security impact of such attacks on some of the infrastructures that we normally take for granted in our daily lives, such as water, electricity, telecommunication and internet, transportation, banking and finance, is too ghastly to contemplate.

Of course, the airline industry has often been the primary target of terrorists, and a series of measures have already been put in place to enhance aviation security. However, the airline industry remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks and there is therefore a need for greater international cooperation in closing any loopholes that could be exploited by terrorists.

All countries big or small are indeed vulnerable to these kinds of threats. As we live in a volatile neighbourhood that is facing threats of terrorism and violent extremism, attacks against critical infrastructure by terrorists are not remote possibilities for us. They are real threats and they have already happened in our region. That is why Ethiopia supported the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) and has been working to implement the provisions of the resolution.

We all know that terrorists and other criminals have developed the capacity to launch coordinated and sophisticated attacks on critical infrastructure. Public institutions, private businesses, factories and industries, roads and bridges, shopping malls, sport centres, among others, have increasingly become targets of attack aimed at disrupting normal economic activities. Cyberterrorism to cause damage to computer systems and telecommunication infrastructures has also become a real danger.

The protection of critical infrastructure can be said to have been partly addressed by international treaties and conventions related to civil aviation, maritime security and nuclear weapons. However, there had not been any resolution dedicated to this issue prior to the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017), which was an important step to effectively counter terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure. Resolution 2341 (2017) remains a very important instrument as it recognizes all those threats and the need for ensuring the reliability and resilience of critical infrastructure, as well as the need to protect it from terrorist attacks for the benefit of national security, public safety, the economy of the concerned States and the welfare of their population.

The resolution directed the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), to continue, as appropriate, within their respective mandates, to examine Member States' efforts to

protect critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks as relevant to the implementation of resolution 1373 (2001), with the aim of identifying good practices, gaps and vulnerabilities in this field. Accordingly, we note that CTED has included this approach under its assessment in its comprehensive visits. For instance, as one of the countries that was visited after the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017), we witnessed how CTED assessed Ethiopia's legal and institutional frameworks and administrative measures in its efforts aimed at protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist threats.

From our work in the CTC, we have also seen from the reports of different comprehensive visits how CTED was trying to include this subject in their assessments. In this regard, we appreciate the work of CTED in supporting Member States to develop or further improve their strategies for reducing risks to critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks and in assessing and raising awareness of the relevant risks and in taking preparedness measures, including effective responses to such attacks.

The resolution also encouraged the CTC, with the support of CTED and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), to continue working together to facilitate technical assistance and capacity-building and to raise awareness in the field of protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, in particular by strengthening its dialogue with States and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations and working closely with relevant bilateral and multilateral technical-assistance providers, including by sharing information. We hope to see more steps taken along these lines.

In this vein, the collaboration among relevant entities at the United Nations, including the Office of Counter-Terrorism and CTED, and the designing of tailor-made programmes on the protection of critical infrastructure by CTITF in line with the potential threats and risks Member States face could certainly be very helpful. It is our firm believe that in addition to what Member states do on their own, it is also through effective international cooperation that the protection, security and resilience of critical infrastructure can be enhanced.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Ambassador of Peru and Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee for his briefing. On behalf of France, I would like to take this opportunity to wish him every success for the next two years at the head of this important committee.

We had the opportunity in the Security Council last week (see S/PV. 8178) to discuss the fact that, despite its military defeat in Iraq and the Levant, Da'esh continues to pose a serious threat to international peace and security, as exemplified by the series of terrorist attacks that continue to dominate the news. The list of Security Council statements to the press is sad proof of that reality. Several terrorist attacks have demonstrated in the past how critical infrastructure, in particular, can be a prime target for terrorists. This is an issue that may sound technical, but in reality it is very close to the daily lives of all our fellow citizens. I would like to make two main points.

First, I would like to recall that the unanimous adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) exactly a year ago was the first time that this threat had been underscored at the international level. We welcome the efforts of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate (CTED) to assist States in the implementation of this important resolution and to facilitate international cooperation in the field of critical infrastructure protection. In particular, resolution 2341 (2017) highlighted two key messages. First, the resolution underlines the importance of prevention and preparedness with respect to potential threats, and the need to identify early on the main challenges and vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure protection, and to develop a targeted strategy to be put in place in the event of an attack. Secondly, it stresses the importance of cooperation, whether it be inter-agency or inter-State, in order to guarantee an appropriate level of protection, which includes the exchange of information, knowledge and experience. Due to the very nature of the activities carried out by these critical infrastructures, close cooperation with the private sector is also essential.

My second comment relates to France's arrangements in this area. The protection of the population, together with guaranteeing the continuity of the nation's essential functions, remains a strategic priority for France. That is why, at the national level, France is constantly adapting its system to protect critical infrastructures as required by resolution 2341 (2017). Our safety system for activities of vital importance, which was set up in 2006, now covers 12 sectors of activity, including transport, health and communications, in particular, and now includes nearly 250 operators of vital importance in the public and

private sectors. It aims to strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure both physically and in cyberspace.

France also continues to support regional initiatives with its European partners. Given the interdependence of the critical infrastructures of European countries, their protection requires increased cooperation between members of the European Union. This is why France has made a major contribution to European efforts to develop the Programme for European Critical Infrastructure, which is a project also supported by CTED. We also welcome the publication by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with the support of CTED, of a practical guide on the protection of non-nuclear energy infrastructure.

This debate on critical infrastructure is a very concrete and operational illustration of the diversity and complexity of the challenges we face. In the fight against terrorism, which must be tackled on all fronts, we have no other options than enhanced international cooperation. France will naturally continue to play its full part in these efforts.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank the representative of Peru for his briefing in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee.

As we heard from Under-Secretary-General Voronkov last week (see S/PV.8178), military successes have left Da'esh weakened and fragmented. But we must remain vigilant, as Da'esh affiliates continue to demonstrate resilience, foreign terrorist fighters seek to return home from the battlefield or try to join new theatres elsewhere around the globe, and individuals and small cells continue to pose a threat. Critical infrastructure remains an attractive target to these groups, which is why the United Kingdom supported the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) last year and why that resolution remains the important part of the Security Council's counter-terrorism efforts.

A central feature of that resolution is to highlight States' responsibilities to develop and continuously improve their strategies for protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, and I am glad that the representative of Peru emphasized this point in his briefing to the Council today. The United Kingdom's national security strategy recognizes the importance of securing our critical infrastructure from all risks, including terrorism, and is fully aligned with our counter-terrorism strategy. That alignment is important because risks to critical infrastructure can come from criminality or natural hazards as well as from terrorist attacks. Our security is enhanced if we develop plans that help us prepare for and respond to multiple eventualities and if we ensure that there is coherence between all stakeholders, from first responders through counter-terrorism agencies to those responsible for managing major incidents and emergencies.

Civil aviation, in particular, remains a target for terrorism because of the potential for iconic attacks and widespread fear and disruption. Guarding against that risk, therefore, remains a key priority for the United Kingdom.

Building on our work here in the Council, where we adopted resolution 2309 (2016), the United Kingdom is investing in new technology that will enhance aviation security, and we worked closely with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on its Global Aviation Security Plan, which was adopted in October. The plan sets out a range of tasks for ICAO States and industry that will help protect civil aviation from a range of threats to security, including terrorism. We were pleased that the Security Council welcomed ICAO's Plan in its recent resolution 2396 (2017), and we reiterate that resolution's call to ICAO, States, the civil aviation industry and all other stakeholders to implement the Plan in full.

I want to emphasize the importance of developing strong partnerships between States and with private industry in order to help us counter the terrorist threat to our critical infrastructure. Here in the Council we regularly affirm the importance of enhancing cooperation between States to counter terrorism, but it is a point that bears repeating once again. In an increasingly globalized world, our infrastructure relies ever more heavily on networks and supply chains that are transnational in nature. To protect it, we have to continue and increase our sharing of information and expertise.

But, as we heard in the statement made by the representative of Peru just now, partnerships with the private sector are also vital. The private sector often owns or manages parts of our critical infrastructure, or the data and technology that underpin it. It therefore has a duty to protect those assets, and Governments have a duty to make sure that it does so responsibly, and with sufficient understanding of the risks it faces. The United Kingdom's Centre for the Protection of National

Infrastructure is a good example of how that can work. The Centre is a governmental technical authority that provides resources, guidance and expert advice to businesses to help guard against external threats, whether they come from international or domestic terrorism or from other sources. The Centre works with private industry to keep it up to date on threats, and helps it to implement appropriate and proportionate protective strategies that include a combination of physical, personnel and people, and cybersecurity measures. In his statement, the Permanent Representative of Peru highlighted the importance of ensuring that States define the infrastructure that is most critical to them so that their resources can be prioritized most effectively. The United Kingdom endorses that principle and therefore ensures that the assistance of the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure is targeted to the most crucial elements of our infrastructure, whose loss or compromise would have the greatest impact.

In conclusion, we must continue to ensure that our infrastructure is protected against evolving terrorist threats, and resolution 2341 (2017) remains a positive step in support of our common defence.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome the new Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), Mr. Gustavo Mesa-Cuadra Velásquez, Permanent Representative of Peru. We are grateful to him for his very detailed report.

Today the threat of terrorism has expanded on a huge scale, including geographically. Terrorists take advantage of gaps in our border control systems to travel across frontiers; they use modern technologies to recruit followers and search for sources of income; they exploit captured enterprises in conflict zones and increasingly invest in legitimate businesses, as we discussed a few days ago (see S/PV.8178). However, infrastructure facilities — airports, oil refineries, communication networks, banks — continue to be extremely attractive targets for terrorists. The situation is complicated by the fact that the elements of critical infrastructure are deeply interconnected, and they frequently operate in more than one jurisdiction. We firmly believe that in these circumstances, the exchange of information and best practices between specialized international and regional platforms, under the central coordinating role of the United Nations, is particularly essential, and we welcome the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) in that regard. As Mr. Mesa-Cuadra rightly noted, the interaction of the CTC and CTED with organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Anti-Terrorism Centre of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Security Council has in its arsenal a whole range of decisions aimed at protecting critical infrastructure from the threats of terrorism, centred around its founding anti-terrorism resolution 1373 (2001). In our view, the premise, affirmed in this toolkit, that it is States that have the primary responsibility in the fight against terrorism and, correspondingly, in protecting their lands and infrastructure from terrorist threats, is of fundamental importance.

For our part, we prioritize issues related to improving the legal framework and implementing practical tasks for protecting critical infrastructure. One of the main targets of terrorist attacks in Russia are fuel and energy facilities. In that regard, as long ago as 2011 we created special commissions responsible for inspecting energy infrastructure facilities for anti-terrorism protection. We conduct joint counter-terrorism exercises and training sessions on a regular basis, including with the participation of the private sector. After the March 2010 terrorist attacks in the Moscow metro, we established a complex programme for the transport security of the population, under which transport infrastructure facilities are equipped with modern protection devices. Incidentally, according to our data, as many as 70 percent of terrorist attacks around the world occur either on transportation or through the use of vehicles.

Besides this, in 2012 we established our Centre for Cyber Incident Response in Information Systems of Government Authorities. We are ready to share the experience we have accumulated in implementing these and other anti-terrorism security initiatives with the CTC and all interested partners.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Kuwaiti presidency of the Council for organizing today's meeting. I would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Gustavo Mesa-Cuadra Velásquez, Permanent Representative of Peru and Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), for his briefing on implementing resolution 2341 (2017), on the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. We have full confidence that under his leadership, the CTC and its Executive Directorate will have a far-reaching impact.

As a result of the serious damage done in 2017 to the terrorist organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, that structure and its affiliated groups are currently changing their strategy and tactics for conducting criminal activities. It is expected that there will be a transition from open armed confrontations to covert targeted terrorist attacks, including on critical infrastructure facilities, in the form of both physical and cyberattacks. Such threats are becoming more dangerous as we consider the increasing digitalization of national economies and the fact that many critical infrastructure facilities and bodies are linked to a single information network.

Close interaction is essential between public and private entities in the protection of critical infrastructure. Likewise, the role of international and regional organizations — including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), INTERPOL, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre and NATO — is just as important.

Nuclear security is currently one of the most important responsibilities of Member States at the national, regional and global levels. Kazakhstan, as a staunch supporter of the movement for a nuclear-free world, attaches special importance to ensuring reliable control over the use, storage and trafficking of nuclear materials, the physical protection of nuclear facilities and preventing nuclear materials and related technologies from falling into the hands of terrorists. We also underscore the importance of improving the legal framework. As an active signatory to all international conventions in that field, we urge other countries to also observe them in good faith and with strong political will. In addition, the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, at the opening ceremony of the IAEA Low Enriched Uranium Bank, held in Kazakhstan in August 2017, proposed to resume the Summit on Nuclear Safety and Security by holding such a high-level meeting in Astana, our capital.

With the start of the functioning of the Astana International Financial Centre, preventive measures are being taken to protect financial and banking system infrastructure from cyberterrorism. Every effort is being made to rigorously prevent the theft of data and money, as well as any disruption of the normal operations of information and communication systems.

Kazakhstan is implementing large-scale measures to neutralize incitement and risks by strengthening its national security, thereby preventing all forms of extremism and terrorism. The legislative norms regarding arms turnovers and security and migration have been updated. At the same time, measures on criminal punishment for terrorists and extremists have been made more stringent.

Taking into account the recommendations of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the decisions and resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2341 (2017), as well as the positive experience of foreign countries, we have accordingly developed the draft State programme to counter religious extremism and terrorism in Kazakhstan for the period 2018 to 2022, which is presently awaiting approval. The new programme envisages measures for the active involvement of the non-governmental sector in the prevention of religious extremism and terrorism.

With that in mind, Kazakhstan strongly supports the following important steps; first, the implementation of the provisions of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, adopted by the General Assembly on 13 April 2005 through resolution 59/290; secondly, enhanced coordination of State policies and actions aimed at countering cyberterrorism as one of the threats to the security of critical infrastructure; thirdly, a greater exchange of best practices for the physical protection of critical infrastructure; and the development of an effective mechanism for mutual early warning and information-sharing on possible criminal plans by terrorists to commit attacks.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Kazakhstan's commitment to the fight against international terrorism, including by implementing relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 2341 (2017).

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I take the floor briefly once again, in my national capacity, to associate myself with my colleagues who have acknowledged the importance of convening this meeting in accordance with resolution 2341 (2017), on protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. Peru welcomes and supports the efforts of the United Nations and the Security Council in that important

area, including the establishment of a specific Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force.

We consider it of the utmost importance to evaluate the efforts of Member States to protect their infrastructure against terrorist acts, as well as to develop preventive measures within the framework of their national strategies and policies. We also believe it is important to work on rebuilding damaged infrastructure. In our experience, that is key to effectively fight terrorism and build sustainable peace.

We would like to recall, that between 1980 and 1992 — the worst years of terrorism suffered in Peru — the economic damages amounted to more than $20 billion. To put that number into context: the gross domestic product of Peru stood at $36 billion, while poverty exceeded 60 per cent of the population. Peruvians have now closed that sad chapter, with the economy having grown substantially, to almost eight times what it was at that time, and poverty having been reduced to 20 per cent. However, the lesson that we as Peruvians have learned from those dark times is that we must always remain vigilant over terrorism and never let our guard down.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Peru, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001), concerning Counter-Terrorism, for his briefing on terrorism and critical infrastructure.

Today marks exactly one year since the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017). Financial networks, energy facilities and food distribution systems do not only form the pillars of our countries, they are vital to the welfare of our societies. Much of those networks and systems transcend borders. As such, critical infrastructure serves to underline our vulnerability and the close linkages between our countries and our national security. I would like to focus on three important aspects in my intervention, namely, the protection of soft targets, public-private partnerships and further multilateral action.

First, protecting our critical infrastructure is vital to enhancing our security. In that regard, protecting soft targets is a specific concern. We have all been shocked by terrorist attacks on concert halls, markets and hotels. Those attacks have a huge impact on our societies. As we will not change our way of life or give in on our freedoms, we have to enhance our resilience. Enhancing resilience starts with appropriate risk assessments based on solid risk analyses. Developing those assessments requires the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. The Government should play a facilitating role in that, but it is up to the private sector to assume its responsibility as well.

That brings me to my second point: in many countries, the majority of critical infrastructure is privately owned. In the Netherlands that figure is as much as 90 per cent, making public-private partnerships essential. We need to involve private partners in sharing knowledge and shaping our policy. In the Netherlands, therefore, we have set up so-called information-sharing and analysis centres across 11 sectors, including finance, energy and cybersecurity. With regard to the latter, the scale of insecurity caused by the proliferation of significant cyberincidents will demand increased action from all stakeholders. To that end, our national cybersecurity centre facilitates sharing information between critical infrastructure partners, including from the private sector, to mitigate the impact of cyberincidents.

My third, and final, point is on multilateral action. Even though protecting critical infrastructure is a national competence, the United Nations and other multilateral organizations have an important supporting role to play. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate plays a central role in mapping countries' capacities to protect critical infrastructure and identifying possible gaps. The Office of Counter-Terrorism is key for coordinating subsequent capacity-building by the United Nations. Other organizations are equally important. For example, in the context of the European Union (EU), the Netherlands and the EU, together with public and private partners, organized a tabletop exercise to practice a possible disruption of electricity networks.

Like the representatives of Peru, the United States and others who spoke before us, I would also like to highlight the work done by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). Last September, the GCTF launched the Antalya memorandum on the protection of soft targets in a counter-terrorism context. That initiative, led by the United States and Turkey, offers publicly available and ready-to-use good practices to include in national policies. As co-Chair of the GCTF, we are grateful to the various United Nations entities that have contributed to the development of these good practices

In conclusion, we welcome the progress made in implementing resolution 2341 (2017) and encourage further cooperation between Member States and between multilateral organizations. Only by working together can we increase our national and global security.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized today's important briefing on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. We also appreciate the excellent presentation by His Excellency Mr. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism.

We commend Ukraine's leadership last year on this issue in the Security Council. Let me also stress the importance in this area of the efforts and engagement of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. This briefing concerning the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017), on critical infrastructure, gives Council members another opportunity this month to send a strong message about the crucial nature of international cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

I believe that we need to focus on three things that we believe are of significance and that together can serve as safeguards against potential threats.

The first aspect is preparation. It is essential that plans for the protection of our critical infrastructure be comprehensively elaborated, targeted, maintained and tested. We took due note of the call made on States in resolution 2341 (2017) to develop their own strategies to prepare and respond to any attack.

Poland's approach to reducing the risk to our infrastructure assumes all types of risks. That requires the development of plans that can be used to respond to many types of disruption and threats to people's lives. That approach has helped not only to reduce risk but also to improve responsiveness.

Secondly, and equally important, is the issue of protection. The threat to some elements of our national infrastructure may be theoretical; however, there are some areas, in different countries, where the probability of a threat is always high. One of these areas is transport networks. Both surface and air transportation are under serious and enduring threat from international terrorism. That is why strengthening critical infrastructure protection must be done in cooperation among States.

Finally, I would like to focus on partnership. The critical infrastructure that we need to protect is not solely owned by the private sector and therefore forms part of complex supply chains and international networks. While Governments have an obligation to ensure that industry is managing this risk comprehensively, private companies are responsible for ensuring that the infrastructure is protected and that essential services are provided.

As resolution 2341 (2017) stresses, stronger international partnerships are needed most when the functioning of infrastructure relies on cross-border networks and supply chains. It is the operators of critical infrastructure who bear the responsibility for its protection. The Government supports their efforts through detaining and counteracting, reacting and prosecuting acts of a terrorist nature. Everyone has a role to play in this respect.

To conclude, let me highlight that there must be accountability for all acts of terrorism. The perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of terrorist attacks must be held responsible. As reflected in resolution 2341 (2017), measures to counter terrorism must be taken in accordance with international law, including human rights law.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful to the Permanent Representative of Peru, Mr. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, for the briefing he provided in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism. We wish him every success in his work in heading up the work of the Committee.

We stress the importance of the holding of this briefing, which comes one year after the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017). Sharing our experience and knowledge is key when it comes to providing a high level of protection for critical infrastructure and to strengthening international efforts to increase resilience to terrorist attacks.

Today's global society is part of a complex worldwide network that relies on critical infrastructure, inter alia, and where citizens depend on institutions and basic services for their health, security, education and economic well-being.

Some days ago we mentioned that today's terrorist scenarios are no longer local or regional but are now

a global problem. This has required us to develop practices that on occasion have had grave consequences. For that reason, the international community must stand ready to strengthen its exchanges of information and build capacity and, more importantly, step up its international cooperation.

The transnational nature of terrorism requires a coordinated response from all States and stakeholders in the international community. We believe that the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) represented a comprehesnsive response to this global phenomenon.

The resolution stresses the importance of each country identifying and developing strategies that enables it to eliminate the risks posed by terrorism to its critical infrastructure. It also urges States with the capacity to do so to provide the relevant assistance through technical assistance and the transfer of technology, within the framework of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political independence of States, in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

Capacity-building to provide assistance in risk assessment, improving, monitoring and establishing measures for protection, and responding to threats should be a constant. For that reason, we believe that it is key for us, inter alia, to work to prevent the risk of nuclear terrorism through the total elimination of nuclear weapons and increasing cooperation in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful means, such as electricity generation and nuclear technology in medicine.

We also must enhance cooperation in managing and guarding nuclear waste. We must also take the measures necessary to protect the sea, land and air transport sectors as well as deal with possible threats to sea and air transport through the implementation of appropriate security measures. We must also build public awareness on cyberthreats and their potential consequences.

We also must focus more on preventive security through ongoing risk management that, in addition to being based on actually countering terrorism, is also focused on deterrence. We must collectively strengthen our security while focusing on prevention.

As the world becomes more and more interconnected owing to the increased flows of persons, capital, commerce and information, we are all the more vulnerable to attacks carried out by terrorists who use technology to spread fear in new ways. Given these changes in these practices, it is vital to engage in contingency planning and ensure that we protect infrastructure systems, which are critical components of our economic development. In that regard, we reiterate that all efforts by the Security Council and the Organization towards the elimination of terrorism must count on the maximum support from their members.

Finally, I highlight the need for cooperation in order to bring those responsible for committing terrorist acts to justice so that they can be duly investigated, prosecuted and punished.

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): Let me start by thanking Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001), concerning counter-terrorism.

As we said last year when adopting resolution 2341 (2017) (see S/PV.7882), objects of critical infrastructure have long been attractive targets for terrorist attacks, with potentially devastating consequences. Attacks on so-called soft targets have also been a highly visible feature of the tactics of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. For that reason, we welcomed the initiative of the Ukrainian presidency of the Security Council to put this item on our agenda last year. It is appropriate that we now take stock of where we are in the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017).

We live in a period marked by rapid change. Our modern societies are complex, interconnected and technologically advanced. However, the advances that are making our societies better able to meet the needs of our citizens also render them vulnerable. In interconnected societies and an interconnected world, the consequent effects of a terrorist attack are hard to predict.

We must therefore recognize the need to build resilience into our thinking on critical infrastructure. The protection of critical infrastructure in Sweden is based on two pillars: first, to improve awareness, build resilience and prevent, respond to and recover from incidents and crises; and, secondly, to increase cooperation, including public-private cooperation, as well as international collaboration.

Connected societies require connected system-wide perspectives when it comes to the protection of critical infrastructure. The sheer range of actors alone necessitates robust legislation and platforms for

cooperation. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency developed the Action Plan for the Protection of Vital Societal Functions and Critical Infrastructure in order to raise awareness, build resilience and prevent attacks, as well as increase cooperation among the relevant stakeholders.

We also need to ensure day-to-day cooperation among the various entities that are responsible for vital societal functions. Sweden's Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Council brings together more than a dozen national agencies, from a wide range of areas, with the aim of jointly increasing our national capacity to counter terrorism. Exercises and scenario-training are one important way of ensuring effective coordination across the different agencies. We are currently conducting a large-scale multisectoral cooperation exercise to clearly identify areas of responsibility, reporting lines and processes for coordination in the event of a civil crisis.

Determining what constitutes critical infrastructure is a national matter, but it cannot be treated in isolation. Interconnectedness across borders, jurisdictions, systems and networks is a fact of life. The ongoing threat from terrorism underlines the need to continue the interaction between counter-terrorism actors and those working on crisis management. Within the United Nations, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the members of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force play important roles in such efforts. CTED's country visits are an important tool to help Member States to address such issues together and to inform capacity-building needs.

In addition, it is important to enhance dialogue with international organizations, such as the International Maritime Organization, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, INTERPOL, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Customs Organization and others whose work is important to the maintenance of international critical infrastructure.

The approach of the European Union may offer some examples of how to approach the issue from a regional perspective. The European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection provides a framework for cooperation. It establishes a procedure for identifying and designating European critical infrastructure and for a common approach to assessing the need to improve their protection. The tools and assessment within the European Programme could be duplicated in other sectors and regions.

In coordination with other members, including through the global partnership of the Group of Seven and other multilateral initiatives, Sweden is also engaged in international cooperation to reduce the threat of terrorists gaining access to weapons and materials of mass destruction. In the field of nuclear security, Sweden and the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority have implemented numerous projects since 1992 in order to secure nuclear power plants and other facilities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia that store and use nuclear and radioactive materials.

By definition, terrorist attacks are unpredictable. The increasingly decentralized nature of the terrorist threat and the increased incidence of attacks using simple means that create widespread disruption, including of critical infrastructure, call for increased vigilance, preparedness and cooperation.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Permanent Representative of Peru and Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001), concerning counter-terrorism, for his briefing on protecting critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks.

The current situation of widespread cross-border terrorism represents a major challenge facing us all. In that regard, my delegation appreciates your initiative, Mr. President, to include this item on the agenda of our work.

In adopting resolution 2341 (2017), the Security Council gauged the scale of the damage caused by terrorist acts to critical infrastructure, in particular ports, airports, nuclear facilities, hospitals, schools and transport systems. The transnational nature of terrorist acts calls for States to be more vigilant and requires a comprehensive, coordinated and effective response. The protection of critical infrastructure must also be paid particular attention by States in order to protect the lives of their people. That is why my delegation reiterates the need for every State to increase its level of vigilance, raise awareness among its population and to equip itself with the appropriate means of prevention and protection.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that the effective and more comprehensive implementation of the various legal counter-terrorism instruments could effectively contribute to protecting critical infrastructure. At the regional level, strengthening cross-border efforts is therefore desirable by pooling counter-terrorism tools and by sharing information, experiences and best practices.

Protecting critical infrastructure is at the heart of the counter-terrorism programme in Côte d'Ivoire. In 2015, the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire adopted a law on the suppression of terrorism. Côte d'Ivoire has also signed and ratified the main counter-terrorism legal instruments at the regional and international levels. Following the sad terrorist attack in Côte d'Ivoire's coastal town of Grand Bassam in March 2016, my country's authorities bolstered its counter-terrorism arsenal by taking steps to increase the level of vigilance in order to prevent any further terrorist attacks, including by stepping up intelligence, strengthening the operational capacity of our counter-terrorism units, increasing material resources, training and international cooperation, and by raising awareness among the population on how to act in the case of a terrorist attack.

In order to ensure better surveillance at sensitive sites, my country's authorities have emphasized prevention focused on two major areas, namely, intelligence and operations. Specific intelligence services have been established within different forces and benefit from the support of some of our bilateral partners. At the operational level, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire has set up specialized units within various contingents of the Defence and Security Forces of Côte d'Ivoire whose task is to intervene in any terrorist attack. The units regularly receive appropriate training and the necessary material resources.

Also with regard to training, with France's support, Côte d'Ivoire will host a region-wide school in July to train military and civilian officers on counter-terrorism. Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire authorities have taken measures to prevent the financing of terrorist groups and have established a counter-terrorism action plan for the country.

Côte d'Ivoire world like to reaffirm once again that it is willing to work with all its bilateral and multilateral partners to ensure that counter-terrorism efforts are successful, in particular as they pertain to the risk terrorism poses to our countries' critical infrastructure. Our States must constantly coordinate their policies to combat the terrorist threat, whose human and material toll is increasingly heavy. This scourge must never triumph over our determination.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to join other representatives in thanking Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), for his valuable briefing on the most recent updates regarding the implementation of resolution 2341 (2017), on protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. I wish him every success as Chair of the CTC.

I would like to focus in my statement on three main issues: first, the need to protect critical infrastructure; secondly, relevant United Nations efforts; and, thirdly, international cooperation in the protection of critical infrastructure.

First, it is imperative to protect critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, as it constitutes an easy and attractive target for terrorist groups, which are increasingly developing their capacity and modus operandi. Critical infrastructure is important because it is part of our daily lives. Among other things, it includes public facilities such as energy and water supply networks; schools and hospitals; air, maritime and rail transportation systems; and telecommunications networks. The targeting of infrastructure could result in heavy losses and lead to consequences with a direct impact on us as users. It is also important to note that it is the responsibility of every State to define the concept of critical infrastructure and determine the best ways to protect it.

Kuwait is among the States whose infrastructure has been targeted by terrorists, including an attack on a religious site in 2015 that resulted in a number of deaths and injuries and was intended to sow strife within Kuwaiti society. Consequently, we have sought to heighten our prevention efforts by enacting a number of laws pertaining to preventing terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. That includes legislation on combating cybercrimes that penalizes anyone who sets up a website on behalf of a terrorist organization or individual, posts information about them online or through other information technology means, whether

under a real or fictitious name, facilitates communication with a terrorist organization or its members, promotes their ideology or facilitates their funding, or transmits information on the making of explosives or any device used in a terrorist act.

Secondly, it is imperative to adopt common measures to prevent and address terrorism, including denying terrorists' access to any means of carrying out their attacks, in line with the second pillar of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We also support the actions and efforts of the CTC, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. We urge Member States to continue working together to facilitate technical assistance, capacity-building and awareness-raising on the protection of critical infrastructure, including by engaging with other regional and international organizations to exchange best practices.

Thirdly, we stress the need to encourage international cooperation among States and international organizations, including INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in order to exchange information and expertise and implement joint programmes to combat terrorism and to improve protection for critical infrastructure. We encourage Member States to make use of the programmes provided by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as those of all other international organizations.

We also stress the need for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), which calls for the protection of medical infrastructure, facilities and humanitarian personnel and their means of transportation during times of war. We also call for implementing resolution 2309 (2016), on the protection of civil aviation, and resolution 2322 (2016), on international cooperation in counter-terrorism, and any other relevant Security Council resolution.

The State of Kuwait today hosted a ministerial conference of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, during which more than 70 States and four organizations took part in establishing counter-terrorism strategies and plans. At this first conference of its kind since the defeat of Da'esh in Iraq, participants adopted the Kuwait declaration, which includes a number of the Global Coalition's guiding principles.

The interdependence of critical infrastructure makes it more vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Such attacks using information and communication technology might also undermine the stability not just of the country concerned, but also neighbouring countries. It is therefore important to step up cooperation among Governments and between the private and public sectors. Governments must also adopt emergency preparedness plans.

In conclusion, we reiterate our principled and firm position in condemnation of all terrorist attacks against innocent people and critical infrastructure in violation of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We look forward to further cooperating and coordinating with Member States and the United Nations to combat this phenomenon and reduce the threat it poses to international peace and security.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8181

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8181st meeting

Wednesday, 14 February 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I have come to New York to convey to the Security Council in person — although I could have done it by video, as we have many times — the Secretary-General's grave concern about the escalation of violence in Syria, and to urge the Council to focus on de-escalating that violence and on finding a political path forward for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

We have seen a string of dangerous and worrying escalations, including both inside and outside the de-escalation zones established by the Astana guarantors. There has been a gradual return to back-and-forth competition over territory in Idlib and Hama. We have seen heavy and sustained air strikes across the North-West and in besieged eastern Ghouta, including today. Civilians have been killed on a horrific scale — reports suggest that more than 1,000 have died in the first week of February alone — and strikes have continued to hit hospitals, schools and markets. There have been several allegations of chlorine attacks, in Ghouta and Idlib and now recently also in Afrin. We cannot independently verify those allegations, but such acts, if confirmed, are outrageous and should not go unpunished.

In just two months, 320,000 people have been displaced due to fighting in Idlib — an area that already hosts more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham — Al-Nusra — is active in Idlib. Meanwhile, there are reports of heavy mortar shelling in residential Damascus, wounding and killing civilians, damaging infrastructure, such as Embassies, and falling close to the hotel in which United Nations personnel reside.

The conflict is also spilling over Syria's borders in more than one direction, and there have been increased military intervention from multiple sources. Over the past several weeks, a new cross-border conflict in Afrin has emerged, with no clear end in sight. There are reports of exchanges of fire between Turkish and Syrian Government forces in Idlib, and between the United States-led coalition and pro-Syrian Government forces in the Euphrates valley, with major loss of life. A Russian aircraft was shot down over northern Syria and its pilot was killed. Last weekend, there were Israeli reports of an Iranian drone entering Israeli airspace, which have been denied by Iran; Israeli jets striking targets inside Syria; an Israeli jet shot down by Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire; and of what Israel calls large-scale strikes against the Syria air defence system and Iranian targets. In short, we see developments that raise questions about the sustainability of the Astana de-escalation arrangements, in which we placed a great deal of hope, and threaten wider regional stability.

I have been Special Envoy for Syria for four years now, and this situation is the most violent, worrying and dangerous I have observed during my tenure. I strongly reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to all concerned in Syria, the region and beyond to de-escalate immediately and unconditionally, and urge all stakeholders, including the Astana guarantors, to use their influence to help reduce the level of violence. I also urge that continued attention be given to maintaining the Amman de-escalation arrangements in place in the south.

Not only are Syrian civilians being killed and displaced in large numbers — even greater than before. They are also being deprived of the humanitarian assistance they need. There has not been a single United Nations humanitarian convoy to any besieged area since 28 November, two and a half months ago. Last week, together with Senior Adviser Jan Egeland, I warned the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva of a collective failure to enable effective humanitarian action. At the time, I urged the co-Chairs — the Russian Federation and the United States — as well as other States to take urgent action to ensure immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in particular.

A series of urgent consultations are under way in Geneva. Thus far, no concrete results have been reached, except the one convoy I mentioned earlier. We urgently need genuine de-escalation in order to protect civilians, evacuate the sick and wounded — in particular sick children — and allow humanitarian aid to reach the 390,000 people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. A few minutes ago, we learned that 7,200 people in besieged Nashabiyeh received a partial delivery today. That is encouraging but let us think about it — they account for a mere 2 per cent of the 390,000 people in besieged areas. We need much more sustained humanitarian assistance.

We must also never forget — as underscored by the people in Syria — the need for concrete steps on the release of detainees and abductees, and for the disclosure of information about those who have been missing since March 2011. The United Nations will leave no stone unturned to press the issue, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We also remind the Astana guarantors of their own commitment agreed last December to establish a working group. We urge them to move ahead on this important issue when they meet next. What we are seeing in Syria today not only imperils de-escalation arrangements and regional stability; it also undermines the efforts for a political solution. Yet we will not be deterred from pursuing the Geneva process, which is the only sustainable path towards the solution mandated by the Council.

Members will recall that in December 2017, when I briefed the Council (see S/PV.8142), I laid out a number of parameters and observations regarding baskets 2 and 3 of the agenda — the constitutional and electoral baskets. Then, on 25 and 26 January, I convened a special round-9 meeting of the intra-Syrian talks in Vienna, focused specifically on the constitutional basket. After intensive consultations with the Syrian parties and key States, I made a final statement regarding the constitutional committee to be formed, and stressed that the final agreement on the composition, mandate and terms of reference of the constitutional committee must be reached in Geneva.

For its part, the Russian Federation, which had invited the Secretary-General, also on behalf of Turkey and Iran, to the National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, affirmed that the outcome in Sochi would be brought to Geneva as a contribution to the United Nations-led intra-Syrian talks, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). There were intensive consultations among the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the Secretary-General and myself regarding such an understanding. In Vienna and beyond, I also maintained close consultations with a number of other States at that time.

Accordingly, the Secretary-General asked me to attend Sochi. The Congress took place over one day on 30 January. I attended the opening address by Foreign Minister Lavrov, and senior representatives of Turkey, Iran and other States were present. Afterwards, all internationals left the gathering to enable the discussion to proceed among Syrians. Only Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria, Mr. Lavrientev, remained in the room as host to facilitate the debate, which he accomplished effectively, alongside senior Syrian figures and a presidium of Syrians. I was later officially informed by the hosts that the final statement had been adopted, and was made aware of its content. It has been published on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Arabic, Russian and English, as Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly confirmed yesterday, following his meeting in Moscow with the Belgian Foreign Minister.

As the Secretary-General has noted, the final statement embraced a vision of a future in Syria for all Syrians — as reflected in the 12 living intra-Syrian essential principles that came out of the United Nations-led talks in Geneva in November last year. The final statement agreed in Sochi affirmed that a constitutional committee should be formed and stated that it should, at the very least, comprise the Government; opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva; Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. The final statement noted that care should be taken to ensure an adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components. It made clear that the final agreement on the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for the composition of the constitutional committee should be reached in Geneva, and appealed for the assistance of the United Nations Office in Geneva in that regard.

Given that important final statement, I joined the closing of the Congress to welcome it and to affirm the United Nations intention to proceed speedily and accordingly so as to assist in finalizing all aspects of a constitutional committee, thereby enabling its establishment in Geneva. Furthermore, I publicly noted to the Congress, as I note to the Security Council today, that the mandate given by the Council to the United

Nations in Geneva is to establish a schedule and process for drafting a new Constitution within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). We have been assured by the Russian Federation that it will endeavour to ensure that the Government of Syria fully supports the official outcome of the Congress in Sochi, at which many Syrian Government officials were present. I also take note that the Syrian negotiations commission — that is the opposition embracing all those components specifically mentioned by name in resolution 2254 (2015) — has issued a public statement that is generally positive with regard to moving forward on a constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva.

Since the Vienna and Sochi meetings, both of which were important, I have consulted intensively on the establishment of a constitutional committee. I have had initial discussions so far in Geneva with representatives of the Government of Syria, the Syrian negotiations commissions and a number of other Governments. My team remains in touch with a wide array of Syrian women and men, and I continue to look carefully at the candidates for the constitutional committee, which was conceived in Sochi, and other relevant input. I also continue to pursue the convening of further formal intra-Syrian talks to make progress with regard to all four baskets of the political process in Geneva pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). I am particularly aware of the need to focus, now more than ever, on the establishment of a secure, calm and neutral environment if a constitutional process is to happen and if United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections are to take place under a new constitution, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). From here, I will be travelling to Munich, God willing, where I will consult with the Secretary-General and join a number of ministers and other senior officials who will be present at the Munich Security Conference.

Herewith is the bottom line of my statement. I intend to strike while the iron is hot and move forward the Geneva process, in consultation with all concerned. To do that, I will need all members of the Security Council — that is, the Council as a whole — and all those who have influence on the Syrian parties, including the Astana guarantors, among others, to push hard on three main points. First, they must work towards de-escaltion, civilian protection and humanitarian access. Secondly, they must work to support the United Nations in Geneva so that the Sochi final declaration can take effect within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). Thirdly, they must work to support the United Nations in facilitating the political process for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), in particular with regard to advancing real issues in the basket to promote a safe, calm and neutral environment.

The Syrian people and the United Nations need the Security Council's support now more than ever.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and all his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. The United States fully supports his initiative to bring the parties back to Geneva and begin work on a new constitutional committee in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), but we are not going to bring about peace as the situation on the ground continues to escalate with dire risks for the security of the entire region.

Earlier this week, Iranian-backed militias in southern Syria launched a drone into Israeli territory. It was an egregious and unprompted escalation. Iran was once again doing what it does: risking conflict and testing the will of its neighbours and opponents to resist its aggression. Israel rightly took action to defend itself. The United States will always stand by its ally when confronted by provocations from Iran, Hizbullah or the Al-Assad regime, but that incident shines a spotlight on the reality in Syria today. We are seeing actors engage in a dangerous game of pushing boundaries instead of behaving responsibly and committing to peace.

Last week, pro-regime forces launched an unprovoked attack against the Syrian Democratic Forces and advisors from the coalition to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. This was a large attack involving numerous tanks, artillery and fighters. The coalition acted in self-defence to repel the attack, and the United States will always reserve the right to act in self-defence. But the attack showed the recklessness of pro-regime fighters. Parties on the ground need to adhere to all established deconfliction mechanisms, and ensure that nothing like that ever happens again.

The Al-Assad regime has become a front for Iran, Hizbullah and their allies to advance their irresponsible and dangerous agenda for the Middle East. On every front of the conflict, we find fighters imported by Iran

from Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. When we see the Al-Assad regime starving civilians in eastern Ghouta or pummelling schools and hospitals in Idlib, we see advisors from Iran and Hizbullah helping direct those atrocities. That support for the Al-Assad regime, of course, is not new, but the drone flight this week was a wake-up call for all of us. Iran and Hizbullah are making plans to stay in Syria. When we look out across the Middle East, we know one thing for certain: when Iran and Hizbullah move in, instability always follows.

Therefore, when we talk about peace in Syria, we need to face the reality of what is happening on the ground. Peace is urgently needed in Syria. All of us on the Security Council know that, but we cannot offer support for peace, on the one hand, and ignore the fact that the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East and its terrorist militia are digging in, on the other. Even as we talk about peace at the United Nations, the fighting is getting worse. Much of the violence is happening in so called de-escalation zones. Russia was supposed to guarantee adherence to those de-escalation zones in order to help the political process, but, then again, Russia was also supposed to guarantee the removal of all chemical weapons from Syria. Instead, we see the Al-Assad regime continues to bomb, starve and — yes — gas civilians.

All of us on the Council know what it will take to get to peace in Syria. More than two years ago, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015), which includes a framework for ending the war. The United States is committed to seeing the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which President Trump and President Putin also reaffirmed when they met in Viet Nam in November 2017. We also know how peace talks need to happen. There is no doubt that Geneva and the United Nations-led political process are the sole, legitimate venue for coming up with a political solution in Syria. Special Envoy De Mistura has talked about setting up a constitutional committee, and he must be fully empowered to do so. No party should have a veto over the United Nations decisions about the composition of the constitutional committee, but it is hard to see how a peace process will work while the Al-Assad regime continues to launch all-out attacks against the Syrian people and Iran and Hizbullah are entrenching themselves within the country. Ultimately, we must recognize that the Al-Assad regime does not want peace unless it is peace on its terms — a peace in which every person in Syria who opposes the regime is murdered, tortured, starved, imprisoned or forced to flee the country. If the Geneva process is going to work, therefore, we need to see a change. As one of Al-Assad's key backers, Russia can change that behaviour. It can push the regime to commit to seeking a real peace in Syria — a peace that helps the Syrian people, a peace that helps ensure the region's security. Now is the time for Russia to use that leverage.

The road to peace will come when all of the parties stop provoking each other and choose the responsible path. That path is clear: follow resolution 2254 (2015), support Geneva and, most of all, push the Al-Assad regime to do what it plainly does not want to do. If we rally around those goals, we will achieve real peace in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. It was very interesting to hear his assessment of the results of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 29 and 30 January. His participation on behalf of the United Nations lent the event particular significance. The Congress was a success, and one more important step was taken towards the restoration of peace and stability in Syria. A genuine prospect has emerged for revitalizing a peaceful intra-Syrian dialogue. For the first time, we were able to bring together in one hall more than 1,500 representatives of the majority of domestic forces and from many members of external opposition forces. While we saw no individual leaders from the Riyadh opposition negotiation group in Sochi, a third of its members attended in a personal capacity. This unprecedented representation attests to the understanding established by the Security Council that Syrians themselves must determine their country's future, with no diktats from outside.

The Congress participants affirmed their commitment to a settlement under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and took concrete decisions. The final statement includes 12 principles for the future Government structuring of a renewed Syria, formulated under United Nations mediation. The Syrians agreed to establish a constitutional committee and called on the Secretary-General to instruct Mr. De Mistura to assist in organizing the work of preparation for constitutional reform and on a definitive agreement about the committee's composition and powers. We hope that this will be conducted transparently and that the United Nations mediation will make the most effective use

possible of the understanding reached by the Syrian participants in Sochi. However, one thing is clear, and is the premise we proceed from, which is that the decisions on every issue related to the Government's structure, including the constitutional basket, will be made by the Syrians themselves, without any external pressure or any principles or plans drafted on their behalf or in their place. The Congress also adopted a request to the international community from the Syrians for help in ending the crisis and rebuilding Syria's economy.

Russia will continue to support the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. We regret the position taken by some countries in dissuading some members of the Syrian opposition from going to Sochi. This small group is continuing its less than constructive activities by putting out documents in a narrow platform anticipating the outcomes of the Geneva discussions on Syria's future political arrangements, which does not accord with resolution 2254 (2015). The 12 principles that I referred to represent the sole basis for discussions of constitutional reform issues, as agreed on by the Syrians in Geneva, approved in Sochi and affirmed in the Congress's final statement, which we are circulating today as an official Security Council document. The most fundamental of the principles remain respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, non-interference in its domestic affairs, and the Syrian people's right to independently determine their future.

We are frankly disturbed by the disrespectful attitude of some international and regional stakeholders to the issue of Syrian sovereignty, of which there have recently been some extremely worrying manifestations. It is important to understand that this will not help to normalize the situation in Syria or the region as a whole, and that it exacerbates the conflict and makes the prospects for a political settlement less likely. At the same time, passions have also become inflamed over the humanitarian and chemical aspects of the Syrian issue, as was particularly noticeable against the backdrop of the success of the Sochi Congress. As usual, there are powerful disinformation resources behind this. Just today we heard unfounded new allegations against Syria and Russia from the United States delegation.

There is always some demand being made of Russia. We are not going to demand anything, but we would like to ask our United States partners and the other Coalition partners who can influence opposition members to persuade them to ensure cease hostilities and refrain from provoking further escalation. By the way, we have a different view of the incident that occurred in eastern Syria between Coalition and pro-Government forces. It was an unprovoked attack. We already said during consultations that the humanitarian situation in Syria has different features and causes in different areas. The reasons for each are different and the approach to each of them should be differentiated. I am not even going to bother discussing the unproven allegations accusing Damascus of using chemical weapons.

I would like not to believe that there are still forces that want to torpedo the progress towards a political settlement for the sake of dubious geopolitical advantage. I think that Mr. De Mistura will agree with us that what both the Syrian people and the United Nations mediators need now is concerted support. Any retreat from that would have unpleasant consequences.

Mr. Ndonga Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to commend the efforts of the United Nations, and particularly those of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, who has just provided us with a detailed description of current events in Syria. His briefing was very alarming and worrying — 1,000 civilians killed in the space of a week, 1,200 internally displaced persons and the shelling of residential areas in Damascus are indeed issues of great concern.

The worsening violence is not only disturbing for millions of Syrian citizens, with its numerous casualties and massive displacement, it is also undermining our shared political and humanitarian commitment. The situation in Syria is deteriorating rapidly, with civilians suffering the impact of the political crisis, and in this chaotic scenario we are likely to be facing yet another major humanitarian disaster.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea underscores the need for the parties to the conflict to strictly comply with the obligations incumbent upon them under international law. Actions by parties at the national and international levels should always be carried out within the framework of Security Council resolutions. In that regard, resolution 2254 (2015) urges the belligerents to adopt measures that promote the re-establishment of lasting peace.

The actions of the warring parties that prevent access to humanitarian aid constitute a clear violation of the rules of international law. In the case of a non-international armed conflict, impeding

humanitarian assistance violates human dignity, according to the parameters of Common Article 3 to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and to Protocol Additional II, of 8 June 1977. It should be noted that the attack on humanitarian assistance personnel, facilities, materials, units or vehicles is considered a war crime pursuant to the Rome Statute, both in the context of international and non-international armed conflicts.

Likewise, we join the request made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to guarantee the provision of humanitarian assistance in Afrin, Raqqa, Idlib, eastern Ghouta, Fo'ah, Kefriya and the Rukban camp — areas besieged by armed groups and where the level of violence is critical.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea always advocates a negotiated solution to problems, however complex the situation. In order to achieve the desired political agreement, direct, frank and inclusive negotiations are an inevitable step, which is what Equatorial Guinea advocates. For that reason, our Government welcomes the holding of peace talks in Vienna on the Syrian issue and is glad that, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, 1,500 Syrian representatives from all backgrounds, creeds and almost all political views came together under the framework of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi at the end of last month.

Although criticized by some countries, the Sochi conference was unique in being driven, reshaped and framed by the United Nations. The participation in that intra-Syrian meeting by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Syria, Mr. De Mistura, gave way to the creation of a constitutional committee. Efforts must now be made to ensure the effective functioning of that committee. Equatorial Guinea congratulates the participants for their efforts to engage in dialogue through direct and inclusive negotiations and hopes that the decisions taken in Sochi will lend new impetus to the United-Nations sponsored negotiations in Genevaon the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

Despite all of those efforts, it is entirely necessary to drain the country of all terrorist activity. That must be a priority for the international community, given that the presence of terrorists significantly hinders the possibility of reaching a peaceful and definitive solution to the Syrian issue.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this informative meeting ,and we thank Mr. De Mistura for his complete briefing. We acknowledge his intense and always prudent work, and we express our commitment to positively contribute to the success of his efforts.

We would like to begin by expressing our deep concern about the new and recent actions by regional actors and about the escalation of the conflict in Syria. It constitutes an additional threat to peace and security in the Middle East and should lead us to reiterate the need to end the conflict. It is especially necessary to end the suffering experienced by the Syrian people, as well as the grave and ongoing violations of international law and international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons.

First, against that backdrop, it is now more urgent than ever to move the political process forward. The 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) should continue to guide our efforts; there is no military solution to the conflict. In that regard, we welcome the fact that the parties focused on substantive aspects during their recent conversations, including the holding of United Nations-supervised elections and the constitutional issue.

However, we must express our concern about the lack of tangible results following the eighth and ninth rounds of negotiations held in Geneva and Vienna in December and January, respectively. We believe it is necessary for the parties involved to work constructively in determining the mandate of a constitutional committee, including its terms of reference, selection criteria and other related matters. In that regard, we would like to especially highlight the efforts of Mr. De Mistura to launch, as soon as possible, the constitutional committee agreed to in Sochi. We would also like to underscore the importance that initiatives, such as the one in Sochi, are always complementary to the Geneva talks process, as Mr. De Mistura also indicated today.

Secondly, there is also a need to address the root causes of the conflict. To that end, the solution to the conflict must be comprehensive and allow for the presence of the State in all areas of the country to ensure security, safeguard human rights and promote sustainable development for the entire Syrian population. It is also necessary to promote increased participation by women and young people and to

strengthen civil society organizations, especially in the drafting of a new constitution.

Indubitably, the Syrians themselves bear the primary responsibility for arriving at a solution to the problem. However, the international community and the Security Council have a moral responsibility to end that tragedy, and for that reason we must be united in lending our full support and active engagement to Mr. De Mistura in the successful discharge of his duties.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I am very glad to see him in New York. China commends and will continue to support Mr. De Mistura's efforts to promote the political process in Syria.

Recently, positive momentum has emerged in the quest for a political solution to the Syrian issue. Major progress has been made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress meeting held in Sochi. The meeting has played a positive role in advancing the political process in Syria, and provided new impetus for the resumption of the talks in Geneva. China commends the Russian Federation and other countries for their efforts to hold that dialogue. We support the United Nations in its work as the main channel of mediation for a political solution to the question of Syria.

A political settlement remains the only way forward on the Syrian issue. The international community should support the Geneva peace talks in making substantive progress at an early date, as well as the Astana dialogue in steadily consolidating the momentum for a ceasefire in Syria, thereby pushing all parties in Syria back to the negotiating table through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned approach to reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties — one that accommodates all concerns. During that process, the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria should be upheld and respected.

Fighting terrorism is a major aspect in finding a solution to the Syrian issue. The international community should step up counter-terrorism efforts in collaboration, uphold uniform standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations designated as such by the Security Council.

China has been striving to play a positive and constructive role in bolstering the quest for a political solution to this issue. China's special envoy for Syria, Mr. Xie Xiaoyan, attended the most recent round of Geneva talks as part of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, holding extensive communication with all parties with a view to promoting reconciliation and facilitating dialogue.

Recently, there have been outbreaks of conflict in many parts of Syria, about which China is gravely concerned. China follows closely the humanitarian situation and the refugee issue in Syria. We are ready to continue providing assistance to the greatest extent possible. We stand ready to work with the international community in pushing for an early, comprehensive, just and appropriate solution to the Syrian issue.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for the quality of his briefing on developments in the political process in Syria. It must be acknowledged that the situation is becoming increasingly alarming and of concern on the military and humanitarian fronts. My delegation also congratulates him on his tireless efforts for political dialogue among the Syrian parties in order to find a lasting solution to the protracted crisis in the country.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of intra-Syrian peace talks in Vienna on 25 and 26 January as part of the political dialogue of the Geneva process. Likewise, we encourage the various initiatives that have been undertaken, in particular in Sochi, Russian Federation, with a view to calming and definitively resolving the crisis in Syria in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

My delegation regrets the fact that, despite the declared will of the various stakeholders, the most recent initiatives in the context of the political dialogue among the Syrian parties have not led to any significant progress on the ground. On the contrary, we have for some time been witnessing a military escalation and an upsurge in violence, which, if left unchecked, may lead to a spillover of the conflict.

My delegation would therefore like to call for a ceasefire and an immediate de-escalation of the conflict in Syria at the risk of witnessing a greater humanitarian catastrophe. We once again thank the United Nations for its ongoing efforts to protect and to provide humanitarian assistance to the besieged people of Syria.

In particular, my delegation would like to extend its support to the draft resolution initiated by Kuwait and Sweden to put in place a 30-day ceasefire in Syria, which would allow the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to the populations in distress. In the light of the tragic situation in Syria, we call on the members of the Security Council to show flexibility in order to reach a compromise that will allow the safe delivery of humanitarian aid so as to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

In order to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, my country urges the parties to the conflict to work together towards a lasting political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which is the only way to end the violence and tragedy being experienced by the Syrian people.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. We acknowledge the complexity of his mandate and we would like to once again assure him of our full support for his work.

Since Bolivia assumed its seat as an elected member of the Security Council, we have of course shown our support for the various meetings held in different contexts and at various levels. Each of those meetings provided an opportunity for the establishment of de-escalation zones, a cessation of hostilities and the provision of humanitarian access. For example, the work done in Astana, the meetings in Moscow, Cairo and Riyadh and the agreements on de-escalation zones between Jordan, the United States and Russia and between Russia, Iran and Turkey are signs of progress.

Clearly, our primary concern remains the urgent need to make progress in a political process that allows for a resolution of the conflict in Syria so that the population can regain peace. We believe that there has been a significant step forward. My delegation wishes to highlight the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 30 January, since those commitments focus on strengthening the political process led by the United Nations in the context of resolution 2254 (2015), particularly through the drafting of a new constitution by a constitutional committee. We commend and acknowledge the efforts of the Russian Federation in that regard.

We also highlight the principles agreed at the Congress to strengthen the political process. Such principles would be directly linked to the commitment of the parties to respect the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria in the context of its right to choose its own political, economic and social system without pressure or external interference, as well as to unify their armed forces in order to defend and ensure the rule of law and respect for the rights of their population and to combat the threat of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

A clear sign of the readiness to encourage that process is the establishment of the constitutional committee, composed of a delegation of the Syrian Government and a diverse delegation of the opposition, broadly represented by civil society, women and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders. Together, they cover and represent in an inclusive way most sectors of Syrian society in order to debate the drafting of constitutional reform. We emphasize that part of that agreement has provided that the mandate, the terms of reference, powers, the rules of procedure and the selection criteria for the composition of the constitutional committee should be arrived at through talks conducted by the United Nations in Geneva.

We believe that that is a significant step in the political process, and the results of the meetings held in Vienna and Sochi make it possible for us to acknowledge it as such. However, we regret the fact that the critical situation that the Syrian people are still experiencing with the latest escalation of tensions in recent weeks shows us that there is still a long way to go. In that regard, we echo the words of the Secretary-General when he said: "We must never forget that progress towards a political settlement needs to be accompanied by progress on the ground."

The Security Council now has the challenge of urgently calling on the parties involved to unite their efforts and to continue the momentum provided by the political process in order to promote dialogue and consensus that facilitate common ground so as to reduce the violence and allow the humanitarian access that is so greatly needed at this time. For that, the willingness of the parties is essential to finding a way out of the conflict, which, as we know, has continued for more than seven years.

Finally, we reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and agreed political process, led by and for the Syrian people, that allows a peaceful solution among all parties.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Article 2, paragraphs 1, 4 and 7, of the Charter of the United Nations provide for respect for the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members and that all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. Moreover, no provision of the Charter authorizes the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State. Likewise, all 29 resolutions on Syria adopted in the Security Council stress the strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

It is our right today, as it is the right of all peoples of the world who still believe in the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, to wonder what the Council is doing to ensure respect for those purposes and principles wisely established by the founders, with a view to maintaining peace, security and prosperity following the wars and tragedies that they experienced. We in Syria know that our country is not the first victim of violations of Charter provisions and international law by certain members of the Council. However, what Syria has been enduring is the consequence of silence over the course of decades in the face of such violations. What did the Council do when certain Member States undermined the provisions of the Charter and prevented the Palestinian people from exercising their right to creating an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital? What did the Council do when those Member States themselves violated the provisions of the Charter by invading Iraq? What did the Council do when those same States violated the provisions of the Charter and destroyed Libya? What did the Council do when the same States violated Charter provisions by fuelling terrorism worldwide and called it the jihadi movement? What did the Council do when the same States violated the provisions of the Charter and flagrantly interfered in the internal affairs of Member States and looted their resources, as is the case with several African States?

The animosity of certain countries towards Syria derives from the principle of arrogance of power, rather than the rule of law. It reflects disrespect to the purposes and principles of the Charter and a total lack of serious accountability on the part of those who avail themselves of the law of the jungle.

I would like to explain the unprecedented global terrorist war that my country has been subjected to over seven years, amid the silence of some, the complicity of some, the indifference of some, overlooking of some and conspiring of others. Certain influential countries on the Council — I mean the United States, the United Kingdom and France — have done all they can to destroy Syria, its people and its political standing, in order to settle scores with my country by manipulating the provisions of the Charter and violating its provisions so as to achieve their special agendas related to interference at the expense of the blood and the fate of the Syrian people. They have exploited the media, and unfortunately some United Nations employees distort reality about what is happening in Syria and to lie to international public opinion regarding the human suffering of Syrian civilians.

With regard to the suffering of Syrian civilians, it has been inflicted on them by armed terrorist groups for seven years. Such groups use civilians as human shields, target hospitals and schools and use them as military posts, camps and detention centres for the people they abduct. In the past 20 days, the city of Damascus has been subjected to 1,000 missile and mortar attacks. Some Council members have manipulated the principles of the United Nations Charter and violated its provisions by giving orders to their regional partners to invest all they can in media and materials to support armed terrorist groups, by issuing Wahabi fatwas for the shedding of Syrian blood, by opening their borders to facilitate the entry into Syria of tens of thousands of mercenary terrorists from more than 100 Member States of this Organization, by setting up training camps in neighbouring States and by calling these terrorists moderate Syrian opposition. Today those mercenary terrorists who come from more than 100 states are simply called Syrian opposition. It seems that their DNA has been altered, and now they are just the Syrian moderate opposition.

It is no secret that this support to the terrorists has cost those States $137 billion, as confirmed by the former Prime Minister of Qatar. It is also no secret that the former United States Ambassador to Syria confirmed that his country had spent $12 billion over the four years from 2014 to 2017 in order to change the regime in Syria, as officials in Washington, D.C., want to do in Baghdad, Lybia, Syria, Venezuela and Iran.

WikiLeaks documents have revealed the policies of successive American Administrations and shown that the United States Government has been opposed to my country since the American and British invasion of Iraq. Those countries have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions by giving armed terrorist groups toxic chemicals to use against innocent civilians, subsequently manipulating the locales of such incidents and providing the investigation mechanism with concocting false information and fake testimony to accuse the Syrian Government in order to find an excuse to attack it.

There are 136 letters in the dossier I hold here, sent to the Member States by the Syrian Government and containing very important information on the acquisition of chemical substances outside Syria by terrorists for their use in Syria. Those chemicals were indeed used in Syria and, as I just said, 136 letters were written about them. The Council has the letters, but only a few of its members were interested in reading them.

One of the most important political magazines, the American *Newsweek*, published an article on 8 February written by Ian Wilkie entitled "Now Mattis Admits There Was No Evidence Assad Used Poison Gas on His People". The United States Secretary of Defence admits in that article that there is no proof of the use of toxic gas by the Syrian Government against it people, neither in Khan Shaykhun nor in Al-Ghouta in 2013. The French Minister of Defence, Florence Parly, also said yesterday, like her American counterpart, that there is no documented proof of the use of chlorine gas by the Syrian Government. Yet the words of the French Minister did not prevent her President from threatening to stage an aggression against my country, Syria, as the former United States Administration did. These countries have manipulated the principles of the Charter and breached its provisions when they tried to legitimize the recurring attacks perpetrated by the forces of what is called the International Coalition, led by the United States, the most recent of which was this illegitimate coalition's attack on 8 February on north-eastern Deir ez-Zor, against Syrian popular forces fighting terrorist Da'esh. This region, which is 30 kilometres wide and 65 kilometres long, and which was attacked by the Syrian popular forces against Da'esh, is under United States protection. Da'esh, which we defeated in Deir ez-Zor and Albuqmal, left these two cities under American protection and entrenched its presence in the region along the Syrian-Iraqi borders. When the Syrian popular forces attacked Da'esh there, they were shelled by the United States Air Force. This is clearly yet another example of the Coalition's real mission and the role played by Washington, D.C. in supporting the terrorist organization Da'esh, as it has done in the past, when the United States targeted Syrian Arab Army sites in Jabal Al-Thardah, near Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September 2016, enabling Da'esh to advance and occupy areas in Jabal Al-Thardah.

The Coalition has deliberately destroyed 90 per cent of the Syrian city of Raqqa and has failed to uphold its commitment to defusing tens of thousands of mines left behind by Da'esh before abandoning the city and perpetrating terrorist acts under its two umbrellas — the United States, east of the Euphrates, and Turkey, north of Afrin. It is unfortunate that in his statement, to which I listened carefully, the Special Envoy made no mention of the occupation of various areas in my country by the United States and Turkey. He did say that there was a cross-border dispute in Afrin, but did not mention the illegitimate Turkish presence in my country and the attack on the Syrian city of Afrin.

These States have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions when they stayed silent, along with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, with regard to the repeated attacks by Israel's occupation forces on areas of the Syrian Arab Republic, the most recent being their act of aggression on 10 February, which my United States colleague has attempted to justify by claiming that it was a response to an Iranian drone's flight over occupied Palestinian territory. That is not true; it is false and misleading. It is not the first time that we have witnessed Israeli acts of aggression against the sovereignty of my country. Every member of the Council is aware that Israel continued to violate my country's sovereignty until one of its military planes was brought down by a Syrian rocket over occupied Palestine. Israel has consistently violated my country's sovereignty — and I would like to remind the Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of that.

The Council has been prevented from issuing statements condemning terrorist attacks by military organizations and their launching of more than 1,000 missiles and mortars, most recently targeting residential streets and suburbs, diplomatic missions, infrastructure and churches in Damascus and other cities. Those acts of aggression have resulted in dozens

of civilian deaths and hundreds wounded, most of them women and children.

These States have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions when they talk about what they call besieged areas in eastern Ghouta and the Damascus countryside. They have forgotten that the residents of eastern Ghouta have been besieged from within by armed terrorist groups that are operating from there, using civilians as human shields and attempting to divert humanitarian convoys for the benefit of their supporters or to sell their supplies to desperate people at exorbitant prices, as happened in eastern Aleppo.

At the time when the United States first decided unilaterally and illegitimately to intervene militarily in my country, Washington stated that its goal was fighting Da'esh. After that, it changed its mind, saying that it was in Syria to establish permanent military bases for safeguarding the strategic security of the United States and its allies. It later changed its mind once again, saying that the purpose of its presence in Syria was to establish armed militias in opposition to the Syrian Government and to enable them to exploit oil, gas, water and hydrocarbons and other resources in Syria — in other words, they wanted to establish a mini-State. Subsequently, it changed its thinking once more, stating that it would remain in Syria even if Da'esh was defeated. It said the same thing about Iraq, in order to justify the presence of their forces there. It has continued to change its mind, saying that it would leave Syria only if a political settlement was reached and the security of its allies was assured. Most recently, it has stated that it is in Syria to fight Iran, Hizbullah and Russia. It has shifted its nuclear strategy and is considering the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Tomorrow, perhaps, it will tell us that it is in Syria to fight Martians from the Milky Way.

The Syrian Government commends the Russian Federation's efforts, and specifically President Vladimir Putin's initiative in hosting the Syrian National Dialogue Conference in Sochi, which was yet another demonstration of the fact that the only way to achieve the aims of the political process in Syria is with Syrian oversight and with no foreign interference of any kind. The conference participants represented every sector of Syrian society — political, social, cultural, economic, and more. Two documents were adopted by an overwhelming majority, a final statement and a document calling for the establishment of a constitutional committee. I very much hope that the results that Sochi has produced will not be misinterpreted.

The final statement, voted on and amended by the Syrian participants, was adopted unanimously by a broad majority through a democratic vote, based on the procedures established for the conference. It represents the basic pillar of the political process that will produce future dialogue and discussion, rooted in a solution that, assuming no foreign interference, will be entirely Syrian-led. The final statement represents a legitimate foundation for any political process, especially considering that it reflects national principles that have unanimous support in Syria and cannot be questioned — respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the Syrian people's right to choose their own political and economic system and to maintain the Syrian Arab Army and armed forces.

Given the principle that the Syrian people themselves must determine their future and their Constitution, participants in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi adopted a resolution to establish a constitutional committee. Consequently, the committee should be established according to the resolution voted on by the Syrians. The resolution identified the tasks of the committee, and the participants in the Congress did not grant the Special Envoy to Syria any tutelage, delegation or authority to establish the constitutional committee. We in Syria are committed to the decision taken by the participants of the Congress. We are not concerned with any committee set up by foreign stakeholders, and will not deal with the results of its discussions or with anything related to it. The constitutional issue is a sovereign one.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic remains committed to any political course that would end the bloodshed of the Syrian people, preserve my country's unity and independence, ensure its sovereignty and uphold the principle of the Syrian people to determine their own future through Syrian dialogue. This firm principle has been underscored by all relevant Security Council resolutions on the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to my colleague of the United States, who called for peace in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which was approved by her country. The resolution underscores the need to maintain the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of my country,

Syria. Given that the resolution, which was approved by Washington, D.C., underscores the need to maintain the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of my country, Syria, then why does the United States have forces in parts of my country? Has the United States of America not violated the very resolution that its delegation voted in favour of in the Council, where it was unanimously adopted?

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.